





# HINDUSTANI SIMPLIFIED

BY

**Prof. B. J. VASWANI, M.A.**

**Fourth Edition**

**Rupee One**

Many British and American war-visitors, desiring to learn Hindustani (the lingua franca of India), commit the blunder of immediately purchasing two or three different volumes on this subject, and end by throwing them away as sources of confusion worse confounded. Except for the British Army Officers Commanding Indian regiments, all the American officers and men in India as well as all the British soldiers need to know very little Hindustani, for in most shops and in Government offices, Indians speak English. It is only in a very limited sphere of transactions that the large majority of foreigners are called upon to speak in Hindustani. For this very limited requirement, only the essentials of Grammar and a large number of every day phrases and sentences are needed. Prof. B. J. Vaswani's book "Hindustani Simplified" has been planned to meet these needs effectively to save the foreigners avoidable confusion and unnecessary expense,

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1. **Fundamentals of Grammar**, simplified and applied with examples and exercises for each rule.
2. **Miscellaneous Exercises**, a large number of revision exercises to cover the above fundamentals over again in all the essential applications to every day needs.
3. **Over 400 phrases and sentences of every day use**, classified (Time, Number, Shopping, Conveyances &c) as well as miscellaneous.
4. **Dictionary of nearly 1000 Basic Words** (English-Hindustani.)
5. **Key to all the exercises.**

## NOTE

1. Most stories given in this book are imaginary, and have no reference to any person now living, though the incidents may have occurred and may occur in life in India.
2. The stories are partly composed by Professor B. J. Vaswani, and partly collected, edited or adapted from well-known writers.





# MAJOR'S NIGHTMARE

## I

### The Haunted House

Major William James of the U. S. A. Army in India was a thorough going sceptic in his outlook on life's mysteries. He believed in no Providence, and could never picture to himself any beings above or outside visible nature. Man, according to him, was mere matter born of accident, that went into a void at the time of what we call "death." He regarded everything that could not be brought under the strictest analysis of physical senses as mere Chimera. Accordingly, he received all the tales of spiritualism with a feeling of utter contempt. When he arrived in India, he heard so much talk of invisible worlds, of disembodied spirits, and miracle working faqirs and yogis that he could not help treating some of his Hindu friends in Karachi with a kind of subdued derision, often akin to anger.

One of his Indian friends in Karachi was a local college professor who had opened his home to many cultured American and British Army men in the interest of international goodwill and fellow feeling. On a winter evening in the year 1942, Major William James was at the Professor's place in the company of Chaplain Joe Wheeler of the U. S. A. Army, Lieutenant MacLagan of the R. A. F., and a few other friends. After the customary hospitalities of an Indian home were over, the Professor happened to mention a sensational event which had recently stirred the people of Karachi. Strange things had happened in a haunted house on the outskirts of the City, and the tales of these occurrences had so far been a sealed book to the European and American section of the population. Major William James was immediately interested, not as a believer, but as

a confirmed materialist anxious to poke fun at the expected reaction of his chaplain friend to this story.

"What is actually happening?" asked the Major.

"Well, it is like this," said the Professor. "Not far from the Parsi Towers of Silence on the long lonely road to Drigh Road, there is a small deserted bungalow in a dilapidated condition. Last Sunday, a few College students, hiking in the neighbourhood, passed by it late at night. One of the party halted near the bungalow, and emptied his bladder on one of its back walls. While returning from the place and passing under a tree close by, he felt he saw two fiery little globes flitting from one branch to another. The glowing globes seemed to keep the same distance from each other, about one inch apart. As soon as the student saw this sight, he felt paralysed in every limb, till he received a heavy blow on his back from an unseen hand and he screamed and shouted for dear life. Immediately his friends were on the spot and found him in a faint. They sprinkled water copiously over his face, and he gradually came to. In a low trembling voice, frequently interrupted by nervous glances upwards at the tree and to the back of him, he told the story of what had happened. His companions huddled round him in fright, and were whispering what next to do when one of them saw a woman, all in red, turning the corner of a wall of the deserted house.

"Just look," he said suddenly, and pointed in the direction of the apparition. They all turned their faces to look, but the woman was no where visible, only in the distance they saw two globes of fire always at the same distance from each other, going up and down among the bushes. The entire group of College students almost ceased breathing from fright. For some time they were transfixed to the spot as if by some mysterious spell. Then a military lorry passed by, the spell was broken, and all shouted for help.

The lorry stopped, and they ran up to the driver, and explained the situation. The driver simply laughed a hearty American laugh.

"You said Woman, eh?" said the American soldier, "that is rather interesting, is it not? should like to see the beauty. Was she young?"

The College boys laughed.

"You folks be very backward. To see a lonely woman disappearing round the corner of a house, and not to follow her!—I shouldn't call it fair".

And his audience laughed again.

"Now, what do you want me to do?" asked the Dough-boy. "Give us a lift to the Drigh Road Station, and we shall go back to Karachi by train."

"That's O. K. Get in".

And as the lorry started moving with its badly shaken cargo, series of infernal screams — half human half beast but uncanny in the extreme — seemed to pursue them all the way.

"Looks as if some fellow has been playing a prank on you folks — a gypsy woman with a flare for fun, perhaps..... Here's Drigh and good luck to you all".

So saying, the jolly good American soldier roared through the darkness of the desert road carrying with him the many expressions of gratitude which the College boys had given to him".

Here the Professor paused for breath, and presently asked Major James what he thought of the incident.

"I suppose I agree with the lorry driver. It's all a clever practical joke, nothing mysterious about it", said the Major.

"It is possible," replied the Professor, "the woman in red was just an accident, though from what I know of these supernatural happenings, there could be a mystery about her too. But how would you explain those two glowing balls

skipping high up on the tree and low down among the bushes?"

"Perhaps, a cat or some such creature. Only the eyes visible in the dark, and for the rest, hallucination stimulated by a state of fear".

"Seems plausible. I suppose the blow which the student says he received on the back from an unseen hand is also to be explained on the basis of hallucination!" said the Professor.

"Certainly. Once you put yourself in a state of panic — and you are by nature susceptible — you can believe anything happening to you which never really happened".

"Well, there is a sequel to the story which I have not related. That, seems to me, confounds all your theory of fear complex and hallucination", said the Professor.

"It may be another cock and bull story invented by Superstition. What is it?" said Major James with an air of triumph.

"Morning after the happenings round the deserted house on the lonely Drigh Road, the same College boy was found missing from his bed on the ground floor of his home. A search led his parents to an uninhabited room upstairs, and lo and behold! the boy was dangling from a beam in the ceiling, head down, and feet tied to the beam with a rope."

"Terrible fate, I admit, for an innocent young man, but there need not be any mystery about it."

"Wait a minute, and you will have to rack your brain for an explanation."

"Proceed, Professor. I am listening".

"Well, the boy was disentangled from the beam, and brought down unconscious to his bed on the ground floor. It took his parents an hour to bring him back to consciousness. He started raving incoherent words and sentences about a *jinni* (evil female spirit), in a state of extreme fright, but

when he was ultimately calmed he said that a woman in red had first appeared by the side of his bed, and then led him, by some overpowering spell, mutely to the room upstairs, and tied him to the ceiling."

"I am afraid this is too tall a story for belief. Nothing has happened except in the imagination of the boy — and *there* anything can happen."

"How about the boy being found actually hanging by his feet from the ceiling. That can't be imagined."

"It may be Silly Superstition's invention."

"The father and mother have sworn to the fact, and some neighbours too, who went up to the room on the cries of the parents."

"It may be all coincidental coordination between designing people on one side and fools on the other. I don't think there is anything supernatural about the affair".

Major James said this with a passionate feeling of impatience and annoyance—and the Professor who usually gave a long rope to unbelievers, simply smiled and said nothing. But a yellow-robed Yogi who had so far been an interested listener, suddenly spoke, and all turned their faces towards him.

"People of the West, except for some of their prophets, priests, and poets, have deliberately closed their eyes like the detractors of Galileo, to a world which, though unseen by mortals, exists all the time but which they deny. But your eyes will be opened one day."

The Yogi said these few words with such a visible sincerity of conviction that they produced immediate effect on his audience—all but one. The Major only shrugged his shoulders and there was just a flicker of a smile of scorn on his face.

"Well, let us leave the matter there for the moment. It is getting late, and I must be off to Malir," said Chaplain Wheeler and Lt. MacLagan wanted to go too.

"Before we part, let me say one thing," said the Chaplain again. "There is a story going round the Malir Camp about an uncanny incident. The Professor's narrative may have connection with it. But I do not know for certain. It may be, the victim is the same lorry driver who gave a lift to the College boys. But I shall ascertain. Shall we meet here next Sunday to exchange notes?"

"That will be so nice. Will six in the evening suit all of you?" asked the Professor.

"I hope our doubting Major will turn up."

"But for the pleasure of being in this Indian home, I would rather not. This claptrap about invisible beings and so-called mysteries is so humiliating to a man of science and common sense," replied the Major.

"Wait and see", said the Yogi with a smile which seemed to beam benevolence on all the group—and they parted.

## II

### Soldier's Nightmare

The incidents of the spook story had occurred on the night of Tuesday, 5th January. The Professor's party met on Sunday 10th, and they were to meet again on Sunday the 17th of January. But before they met, the Professor received a letter from Chaplain Wheeler. It read as under:—  
Dear Professor,

You will wonder at my writing so soon after we met last. But something happened on the night we left your place, and I thought you would feel interested, though I had the greatest scare of my life. Lt. MacLagan and I took a taxi from the Elphinstone Street for Malir that night, and as we sped past the Napier Barracks, it occurred to Lt. MacLagan that he had to see a friend there, and he dropped

on the way. I resumed my run to Malir. Exactly at the spot where the poor college boy is said to have had his nightmare experiences last week, a decrepit old beggar happened to be in the way of our taxi. All the trumpeting of the driver would not move him from our way, and we came to a halt—and I noticed the deserted bungalow, the tree in front and the bushes behind. The taxi-driver tried to remove the beggar bodily out of the way, but not finding it easy to drag him to a safe distance, he came running to me, and in a panicky state of mind, with eyes wild with terror, he said, "Sir, this is a *shirr*. It has the power of making itself heavy or light as it chooses. I can't lift it out of the way." I got out of the taxi and moved forward when the driver warned me, "Sahib, don't go near. You may come to some harm." But I went all the same, making signs of the cross, and muttering prayers. When I reached the spot, there was no beggar, only a thorny bush laid across the road. I wondered what this could mean. Was the driver in a state of hallucination, or deliberately playing a hoax, or had my prayer scared away the evil spirit? I remember, however, that I had seen a human object, like that of an old beggar, obstructing the road before we halted. Well, we got moving immediately after, but those infernal shrieks, uncanny and weird, which you mentioned in your story, pursued us for a while and then died away in a long moan. This, however, is not the end of my scare. About 2 a.m. the same night I was awakened by persistent knocking on the door of my room. When I got out of my bed, I found staring at me two malignant glowing eyes, and I could see that they belonged to an unusually big black monkey that was crouching on the table facing my bed. In a state of extreme agitation, I switched on the light, and the apparition vanished. I, then, prayed again and slept with the Bible under my pillow. The rest of the night passed without an incident.



The incident has whetted my curiosity, and I have tried to get at the source of the story of the U. S. A. lorry driver still going round the Station Hospital at New Malir. I am told the driver is an indoor patient in the hospital, but I have not met him. I hope, by Sunday next, I shall have material enough on the subject, and I am looking forward to a very interesting discussion with our athiest friend, Major William James. I suppose, the Yogi will also be with us....I am sending copies of this letter to the Major and Lt. MacLagan...."

On Sunday, as already arranged, all the friends met at the Professor's, and every one was full of animation at the prospect of a fine exchange of views and experiences. The Major bore smiles of unbelieving ridicule all the while on his face and in his eyes.

"Well, Chaplain Wheeler has been lucky. The Bible and the prayers between themselves have proved too much for the ghost. I hope you were not troubled again?"

"The black monkey with its horrid glowing eyes has haunted me all the nights, but the Bible has helped me as surely as as my hat protects me from sunstroke. I can find no other explanation for the disappearance of the apparition".

"Just as the 'appearance' is the result of mental oberation, so its disappearance is the result of restoration of mental balance — that is all. Your Bible, because of centuries-old habit of mind, restores you to normality, and the ghosts which never existed go out of sight," suggested the Major with a sort of vehement emphasis.

"Don't you believe there are any such beings as good spirits and evil spirits in the world?" asked the Chaplain. "Frankly I don't believe there are any except among the living men who are good as well as bad," asserted Major James.

"What about angels and the heavenly host mentioned

in the Bible? Were all the prophets of the world who have left us accounts all labouring under hallucination?"

"Without meaning offence, I should say this reliance on authority, however exalted, is derogatory to human rationalism".

"Do not the scientists rely on authority?" put in the Yellow-robed Yogi.

"They do, but the conclusions of those authorities are open to inspection and experimentation and ocular proof by any one".

"That is all right, but those who believe in an invisible world and the existence of spirits say that they have acquired knowledge of them by personal realisation, and assert that anybody following their methods of investigation can arrive at the same truths," suggested the Professor.

"You believe in the existence of electricity and its many miracles. But to get a first hand knowledge about its behaviour, you have to do a lot of things which everybody is not willing to do. Most people take it as scientific truth, and that is all. You, as a man of science cannot say that because the world we are talking of is, for the moment, invisible to the majority of mankind, it cannot possibly exist — and when the authorities in this field of research tell you 'this world of truth is different from the ordinarily visible world, and there is a special technique and apparatus for discovering it,' why do you materialists fight shy of following that technique?" asked the Yogi.

"You mean that we scientists should sit fixing our gaze on the tip of our noses, and performing foolish mortifications of flesh to find that world?" said the Major in derision.

"Have not the pioneers of physical sciences subjected themselves for whole lives to gruelling mortifications of the flesh and spirit? Why, in the interests of truth, should they not be prepared to do it in this case"?

"On the face of it, these things are absurd. No man with a grain of commonsense could put up with these methods of ascertaining the so-called occult facts of life," said the Major.

"This is hardly the attitude of a true man of science. I will not say much about commonsense, because commonsense is after all a very commonplace quality which cannot reach the high altitudes of uncommon endeavours. Science of today is becoming as bigoted in its tiny conclusions as the church of old, and having reached a body of physical truths now says "Ne Plus Ultra," there are no further worlds to discover, in fact nothing else exists, and all endeavour to discover anything else is blasphemy. Do you think this is commonsense. Is it science?" put in Lieutenant MacLagan.

"I thought our British friend was a rationalist. His rationalism seems to be rapidly disintegrating under the combined attack of the majority here. I must, therefore, fight a long fight against rank superstition."

"I do not say I believe in ghosts and spirits, but when I am not prepared to accept the challenge of its believers for experimentation, as a man of science the only attitude I can possibly adopt is 'It may be all true. But I am not in a position to investigate for myself,' replied Lt. MacLagan.

"It seems reason is getting the better of you, and mere argument may silence you, but not me," argued the Major.

"Then you must admit that you scientists will discard even reason to maintain reasonless unbelief. It comes to this — if a fact is contrary to your beliefs based on partial truths of the physical world, you will condemn it as unscientific and unworthy of investigation. In what way is a scientist, then, better than a religious bigot?" was the animated reply of Chaplin Wheeler.

"But you had said, Chaplain, that you would find out the story of uncanny happenings going round the Malir Camp. Is there anything new?" said Major James, glad to evade the onset.

"Oh, yes, I forgot all about it in the midst of heated argument. The lorry-driver is the same who helped the College students out to the Drigh Road Station. He is in the Station Hospital, and tells a strange tale. It seems, curiosity led him and a friend that same night to the deserted bungalow. They expected also to find a lone desert 'Beauty.' The friends loitered round the haunted house for some time, when passing under the neighbouring tree, one of them felt as if some one was walking before him. He directed his torch light to his feet and was amazed to find a footprint forming on the sandy ground just a yard ahead of him. The two friends started at the phenomena, and stepped forward — another footprint formed itself, and still another before their eyes—prints of small bare feet. As the prints formed in quick succession, the two friends followed them spell bound without a whisper till they were led to the door of the deserted bungalow — and to their further surprise the Doughboys found the door moving open as if some invisible agency was inviting them inside".

Here, Major James burst forth into a series of guffaws, and Chaplain was red all over in deep irritation, while the Yogi said in cool unruffled accents, "My dear friend, you invited Chapain Wheeler to tell you the story. It is a simple act of courtesy that we should patiently listen." This quiet snub was sufficient, and though the impatient unbeliever in Major could not refrain from muttering "Phantasmagoria," they settled down to the narrative once again.

"As soon as the 'boys' entered the door, the footsteps disappeared, and it appeared to them as if somebody, invisible all the while, was dusting the old furniture, opening

the windows and preparing quite a reception for them. A second room also seemed to be all bustle with the noise of chairs and sofas and bedsteads being moved about and dusted. The two boys stood aghast at the phenomena for some time, till the lorry-driver felt his wrist being gripped by a powerful hand. In the split of a second he was dragged inside the second room, and the door closed on him before he could shout 'Help, Dan, somebody dragging me in,' to his friend. Dan ran to his help but bumped his head against a jammed door, and stumbled down to his feet. Then in the dark of his room glowed two infernal eyes which seemed to be slowly advancing on him — and with a great yell he bounded to the door and was in an instant out in the open, forgetting all about his lost friend. He ran wildly to the road, while uncanny shrieks pursued him in his flight. When he returned to the Camp, he was hardly recognised by his friends, so transfigured he seemed to be by all that had happened to him — but he was able to convey an impression that his friend Sherman was a prisoner in a haunted house. Nobody knew anything about the haunted house, but a search party was immediately organised, and they found Sherman, after nearly three hours, almost lifeless on a bed in the second room of the haunted house. When he came to the next day, he related an extraordinary sequel to the story. After the door of the second room had closed on him, he frantically struggled for some time with the invisible force that had dragged him inside. During the struggle, in the light of the torch which he happened accidentally to press, he had glimpse of a woman all in red lying in a seductive posture on an old bedstead. In a moment, all his agitation and fright changed to irresistible fascination — and he moved slowly to the bed to which the woman seemed to welcome him. He forgot all about the haunted house and what had happened to him and his friend only a short while ago, and presently the starved

physical cravings of the soldier were being gratified in the arms of an unknown mystery woman. But this mating seemed to be carried beyond the normal course of human strength, and after a time the young driver felt that in some mysterious way all the sap of life throughout every portion of his body was being squeezed out of him. He tried to shake himself free, but he felt himself powerless to do so, and he lost all consciousness till the time that he found himself next day in the Station Hospital—that is the end of the story, and now Major James is free to laugh if he feels like it."

"Exceedingly interesting—as fiction," was the laconic reply of Major James in the tones of subdued sarcasm. "Can you, Major, point out anything in the incidents of this story to stamp it as pure fiction? Sherman, the lorryman, I suppose, has not invented the story. The events may be unusual, but they have happened to him—and Chaplain has related them as he has got them from the victim himself," suggested the Professor.

"Yes, that is all right, but what Sherman has stated may be not what has actually happened but what he has imagined," replied the Major.

"What about the foot prints being seen not only by Sherman but also by his companion, what about the doors opening, furniture shifting and all that. How could all that be imagined? And then the woman seeking and finding a mate, and the cause of Sherman's completely exhausted condition?" asked Lt. MacLagan.

"All is the abnormal working of excited imagination. Sherman had been inflamed by the mention of a woman, and the story of his association with the woman in red is something in the nature of a wet dream in which the subconscious terror about a so-called haunted house has mingled with Sherman's anticipations of sex enjoyment," replied Major James.

"How do you account, then, for the opening and closing of doors, and all that?" asked the Chaplain.

"All imagination," said Major James.

"I am afraid our friend the Major is determined not to be convinced," said the Yogi. "In the ancient Hindu books on occult sciences there is mention of invisible beings, the restless spirits of human females who in their lives on earth were exceptionally erotic, and who as spirits after death still seek satisfaction by taking material forms and mating with men who are in search of sexual gratification. To me, the woman in the story is a fact known in occult sciences as a vampire. But I am afraid Major James has nothing to do with these sciences."

"To him, I am afraid, the only sciences worthy of attention are those of visible nature," added the Professor.

"Yes, you are right there, Professor. I don't waste time in considering superstition."

"I hope and believe you will be wiser some day, and be truer scientist for all that," suggested the Yogi.

### III

#### The Major in Trouble

For nearly two months after the happenings of the haunted house, Major James lost contact with his friends. Lt. Maclagan had left Karachi for the eastern border of India, and Chaplain Wheeler had gone to Delhi. The Professor sometimes met his Yogi friend, but wondered why Major James neither wrote to him nor made his appearance at his place as he did at least once a month. He happened to inquire of some mutual friends and they conveyed to him the impression that Major James had of late been in strange moods, that something seemed to weigh

heavily on his mind though he had not disburdened himself to any one. It is after this first indication of trouble that the Professor sought the Major out in his hotel and inquired as a friend what was the trouble with him. The Major was in the deepest gloom and very restless, but the Professor was able to induce him to confide his troubles to him.

"My present trouble, Professor, has a history behind it, and I don't mind telling it to one who is a stranger in one way but a friend in another. You have been so friendly to all Americans that when I am with you, I lose all consciousness of the fact that you are an Indian and I am American."

"So good of you to say that. I have been feeling the same towards you and other friends. Barriers of race, colour and culture have never presented a great obstacle in the way of communion between kindred spirits. I wish I could help you in your trouble. It is hardly a friend's part that you should have kept out of all contacts for near two months."

"I am so sorry, but my mind has been on the rack all these days. You know, Professor, I have an elder and much beloved sister, my only surviving relative. She married fourteen years back, and ever since our parents died twenty years ago, I have been living for her and her children. The greatest happiness of my life is to be in the midst of my sister's children, or to hear from them. The last time that I heard from them was about two months ago, and she said that she was moving to Detroit to set up a new home in that place, her husband having secured a well-paid job there. I regard my sister with feelings more filial than fraternal, and her children are as dear to me as might have been my own. At the time of the great catastrophe twenty years ago, which in the course of a few



days lost us our fortunes and our mother, she it was, that sweet big sister of mine, who made of herself of her own accord the guardian angel of the ruined family. For me she attempted to replace the Professor that could no longer be afforded, and renounced her own happiness. She sacrificed herself and the man she loved, by indefinitely postponing their marriage in order to help our father and me by her undivided devotion. Oh, how I loved and revered her then, and how time has strengthened this earliest family affection. To say that a materialist grows hard-hearted as he grows older, that he cannot love as a believer does, is simply the greatest fallacy." Here the Major paused as if to obtain a confirmation of his opinion.

"I have, within my own experience, known some atheists who are true friends, affectionate relatives and great patriots," responded the Professor.

"Thank you so much for this heartening statement. Well, now to my family history again. My poor father did not long survive his wife and his fortunes, and the bond of affection between me and my sister grew. It was this holy fraternal love that led me also to sacrifice my youth to secure my sister's happiness. I was almost a boy when I left home for the Phillippines, and working with the desperate earnestness of a man who has but one noble object in view—to help the sister I loved—I very soon secured the confidence of my employers who raised me to a position of trust. My first real pleasure and reward was when I saw my sister married to the man she loved, and to help them in their struggle. My devotion for my sister was so great that the thought of burning that sacred fire of love before any other idol never entered my head. This was the only church I recognised, the only church in which I worshipped. For my sister and her children I have remained a bachelor, that the wealth I acquire should go undivided to them."

"It is such a noble thing in life to love as you have loved," warmly interrupted the Professor. "I, a confirmed believer, have not risen to your heights of self-effacing devotion. Now, what exactly is your present trouble? Anything wrong with your sister?"

"I came to India, continued the Major, nearly seven months back, and there is hardly a week when I have not heard from my sister or her husband or her children almost once or twice. But these two months, all of a sudden there has been an unaccountable break in communion. Day by day, I become more restless, more apprehensive of some great misfortune. Vainly I look for a letter, a simple message; and my efforts to account for so unusual a silence have been fruitless."

"With all due deference to your known views on the subject, may I appeal to you to consult a holy man? He will tell you all, any you may come to feel at rest," suggested the Professor. "Just at the present moment, there is living in seclusion a Buddhist Yamabooshi who possesses great and wonderful gifts of seership. He may be induced to help you."

"I give you friend's credit for good intentions. Professor," replied Major James, "but these great magicians of yours who pretend to possess super-mundane knowledge, are mere fake fortune-tellers. Their claims to the miraculous are simply odious to my notions. I don't believe that your Bamayooshi, or whatever you call him, can do anything in the matter."

"It is such a regret to me that you place yourself beyond the bounds of help. But it is only at rare intervals that a town receives the blessings of a Yamabooshi's visit, and I thought I would be able to induce our Yogi friend to secure his blessing for you. You are much mistaken in your estimate of the character and powers of these holy men

of India, and you are irrationally violent in your attitude in the matter," replied the Professor.

"I am sorry I seem to have annoyed you, but I have neither faith in, nor use for, supernatural powers in man, and I shall be going against all the convictions of my life to accept your offer, for the good intentions of which I must thank you."

And the Professor, slightly grieved, but still warm in his wishes for the welfare of Major James, rose to leave.

"Don't stand on formalities," he said in the end, "if at any time you think I can help you, do come and let me know your trouble," said the Professor in parting proof of continued goodwill.

A week passed by, and Major James still kept aloof. On a Sunday evening, thereafter, while the Professor was driving to the town, he spied the Major going in the direction of his home. Feeling strongly that the Major was on a visit to his place, the Professor turned back.

"Hullo! Major," shouted the Professor as soon as he was near enough, "How do you do? I thought you were bound for my place."

"You are right, Professor. Shall we go somewhere and have a quiet talk, if there *can be* any quiet for my mind?"

"You seem to be still in trouble. No letter from home?"

"No, not a word, and I am in a hell of agony with suspense and forebodings."

"Why not accept my offer, my dear friend, and have done with this agonizing suspense?"

"Ever since you made the suggestion, I have fought against it, but my despair at the absence of news from home has created in me a morbid desire to learn, the worst if necessary. I have struggled hard with the feeling, but it has had the best of me. I have, in my abject surrender to unknown fears, been drawn into a shameful, superstitious

longing to learn—if not the future, at any rate what is taking place back at home. I have caught myself, on occasions, straining my mind to the verge of lunacy in an attempt to look beyond the oceans, and learn, at last, the real cause of this long, inexplicable silence."

"I am glad you want to know. Fortunately, our Yogi friend will be at my place in half an hour. I shall persuade him to take us to the Yamabooshi, and obtain his aid," replied the Professor.

About an hour after, Major James was striding up a lonely hill beyond the Karachi Central Jail, in company of the Professor and their Yogi friend. They reached the hill top on which was situated the temple of Hindu Goddess Kali, and in a few minutes more, Major James was face to face with the Yamabooshi. Uncommonly tall and majestic, though pale and thin, the Yamabooshi struck Major James as one who knew his moral superiority. He had an air of calm and dignified composure which scorns to notice the mocking and irrevent questions of those who fail to recognize his superiority. To some of his impatient questions which Major James asked one after another with feverish eagerness, the Yamabooshi made no reply, but he gazed on him in silence as a physician would look at a delirious patient. The Major felt as if the Yamabooshi's eyes penetrated his brain and heart like an arrow and set to dig out therefrom every thought and feeling. To break the spell, the Major defied the Yamabooshi to tell him what he had in his thoughts. Calmly came the correct answer—extreme anxiety for a female relative, her husband and children.

"Can you, sir, tell me anything of the present state of that beloved sister of mine?" was the next question.

"The foreigner will not believe in the words, or trust to the knowledge, of any person but himself. Were the Yama-

booshi to tell him, the impression would wear out a few hours later, and the inquirer find himself as miserable as before," replied the hermit. "There is but one means," he continued, "that is to make the foreigner see with his own eyes, and thus learn the truth for himself. Is the inquirer ready to be placed by a Yamabooshi, a stranger to him, in the required state?"

The Major smiled because even in his never-ceasing mental agony, he regarded this as a ridiculous operation. But he silently bowed his consent, believing the experiment harmless.

## IV

### Magic Mirror

The old Yamabooshi lost no time. He looked at the sun, and finding the Spirit of the Rays propitious for the ceremony, he drew out a bundle. It contained a small lacquered box, a piece of vegetable paper, and a pen with which he traced upon the paper a few sentences in an unknown script—a peculiar style of some written language used only for religious and mystical purposes. Having finished, he exhibited from under his clothes a small round mirror of steel of extraordinary brilliancy; and placing it before the Major's eyes, asked him to look into it. What happened to the Major then, is best described in his own words from the account that he wrote later.

"I first imagined that the intention of the Yamabooshi was to evoke a spirit who would answer my queries. What happened, however, was something of quite a different character. No sooner had I touched the mirror than I suddenly felt a strange sensation in the arm of the hand that held it. Something like a living thing of ice crept across

my brain, producing therein a sensation of horror, and then clutched at my heart as if a deadly serpent had fastened its fangs into it. With a convulsive jerk, I dropped the mirror, and could not face myself to pick it up again. For one moment there was a terrible struggle between some undefined longing to look into the depths of the polished mirror and my pride. This feeling of revolt against my growing superstition was, however, short-lived. There was an opened novel lying on a lacquer table near me, and as my eyes happened to fall on its pages, I read the words, 'The veil which covered futurity is woven by the hand of mercy.' This was enough. That same pride which had hitherto held me back from what I regarded as a degrading superstitious experiment caused me to challenge my fate. I picked up the ominously shining disk and prepared to look into it. While I was examining the mirror, the Yamabooshi hurriedly whispered a few words to the Yogi and the Professor at which I threw a furtive and suspicious glance at both. "The holy man desires me to put you a question and give you at the same time a warning," said the Yogi to me, "If you are willing to see for yourself now, you will have to submit to a regular course of purification after you have learnt what you want through the mirror. Otherwise you will become for the rest of your life, an irresponsible seer, seeing for ever all that is taking place at whatever distance, and that against your will or inclination" I asked defiantly what that course of purification was and what I had to promise. The Yogi said that I had simply to promise that I would submit to the process. "There will be time enough to think of it, if I see anything," I sneeringly replied. "Well, you are warned, friend. The consequences will now remain with you," was the solemn answer of the Yogi.

"I glanced at the watch, and made a gesture of impatience

which was remarked and understood by the Yamabooshi. It was just seven minutes after seven. 'Define well in your mind what you would see and learn,' said the conjuror (as I then regarded him), placing the mirror and paper in my hands and instructing me how to use them. For one short moment I hesitated again, but I replied, while fixing the mirror, 'I desire but one thing—to learn the reason or reasons why my sister has so suddenly ceased writing to me.' Immediately, I seemed to lose consciousness of the surrounding objects.—the room, the Yamabooshi, the Yogi and the Professor, but I could see the whole of my head and back as I sat leaning forward with the mirror in my hand. Then came a strong sensation of an involuntary rush forward, of snapping off, so to say, from my body. And then, while every one of my other senses had become totally paralysed, my eyes unexpectedly caught a clear and vivid glimpse of my sister's new house in Detroit which I had never visited and knew only from a sketch. Together with this, I had suddenly a mental vision of myself, of that which I regarded as my body, lying with ashy cheeks on a settee, dead to all intents and purposes, but still staring with the cold and glassy eyes of a corpse into the mirror. Bending over it, with his two emaciated hands cutting the air in every direction over its white face, stood the tall figure of the Yamabooshi, for whom I felt at that instant a murderous hatred. As I was going, in thought, to pounce upon the charlatan, my corpse, the Yogi and the Professor, the room itself and every object in it, trembled and danced in a reddish glowing light, and seemed to float rapidly away from "me". A few more grotesque, distorted shadows before "my" sight; and with a last feeling of terror and a supreme effort to realize *who then was I since I was not that corpse*, a great veil of darkness fell over me like a funeral pall; and every thought in me was dead . . . . . After a time, I once more returned to my

senses, but how strange! where was I? I was moving rapidly forward, while experiencing a strange sensation as though I were swimming, without impulse or effort on my part, and in total darkness. The idea that first presented itself to me was that of a long subterranean passage of water, of earth, and stifling air, though bodily I had no perception, no sensation of the presence or contact of any of these. I tried to utter a few words, to repeat my last sentence, "I desire but one thing to learn, the reason or reasons why my sister has so suddenly ceased writing to me", but the only words I heard out of twenty one, were the two, "to learn", and these, instead of their coming out of my own larynx, came back to me in my own voice, but entirely outside myself, near but not in me."

## V

### A Vision of Horror

"One more rapid, involuntary motion, one more plunge into the black darkness of an unknown element, and I saw myself standing—actually standing—underground. I was compactly and thickly surrounded on all sides, above and below, right and left, with earth, and yet it weighed not, and it seemed quite immaterial and transparent to my senses. One second more, one short instant, and I perceived—oh inexpressible horror, when I think of it now—a coffin at my feet, in which, notwithstanding its closed lid, I plainly saw a hideous, grinning skull, a man's skeleton, mutilated and broken in many parts. 'Who can it be?' I thought, and forthwith, as if in answer to my surprised query, the hideous, mangled remains began assuming a form. The broken parts joined together one to the other, the bones became covered once more with flesh, and I recognised in the



disfigured remains, my sister's husband, my own brother-in-law, whom I loved so truly for her sake. 'How was it, and how did he come to die of such a terrible death?' I asked myself. Hardly were these words uttered, like some echo of my own voice, when as if in a panorama, I saw the retrospective picture of poor Karl's death in all its horrid vividness—the dear old fellow, full of life and joy at the prospect of more lucrative employment, examining and trying a monster steam engine. I saw him bending over to examine more closely an inner arrangement, to tighten a screw—his clothes were suddenly caught by the teeth of the revolving wheel in full motion, he was dragged down, doubled up, and his limbs half-severed, torn off, before the workmen could stop it. He was taken out, or what remained of him, dead, mangled, a thing of horror, an unrecognisable mass of palpitating flesh and blood. I seemed to follow the remains, wheeled to the hospital, and heard the brutally given order that the bearers should stop on their way at the house of the widow and orphans. I saw my sister, the dear and beloved, and the children assembled quietly together in their new home, unconscious of any impending catastrophe. "I" stood there, and witnessed her unprepared reception of the ghastly news. As the corpse of Karl was brought into the house for identification, I heard a long agonizing cry, my own name being pronounced, and then the dull thud of the living body falling upon the remains of the dead one. I witnessed the sudden and instantaneous changes which the shock was working in her brain. I saw the wormlike precipitate, and immensely intensified motion of the tubular fibres, the instantaneous change of colour in the cephalic extremity of the nervous system, the fibrous nervous matter passing from white to bright red, and then to a dark red bluish hue. I noticed the sudden flash of a phosphorous-like radiance, its tremor and sudden extinction followed by darkness—

complete darkness in the region of memory—as the radiance, almost in human shape, oozed out suddenly from the top of the head, lost its form and scattered. And I seemed to say to myself ‘This is insanity, life-long incurable insanity. . . . The link between the animal and the divine essence is broken! And as the unfamiliar term ‘divine’ was mentally uttered, my ‘thought’ seemed to laugh.

“Suddenly I heard my far-off yet near voice pronouncing the words, ‘why my sister has so suddenly ceased writing!’ And before the final words ‘to me’ completed the sentence, I saw a long series of sad events immediately following the catastrophe. I beheld the mother, now a helpless, groveling idiot, in the lunatic asylum, the seven younger children admitted into a refuge for paupers. Finally, I saw the two elder, a boy of fifteen, and a girl a year younger, my favourites, both taken by strangers into their service. A captain of a ship carried away my nephew, and an old Jewess adopted the tender girl. I saw the events with all their horror—but the word ‘horror’ which I use now should be understood as an after thought, for during the whole time of the events I saw, I experienced no sensation of either pain or pity. . . My feelings seemed to be paralysed as well as my external senses.”

“I had hardly time to see my unfortunate young niece in her new Israelite home, when I opened my eyes, and the first thing I noticed by accident was my watch—the hands of the dial showed seven minutes and a half past seven—had I passed through all those terrible experiences, which it would take hours to narrate, *in just half a minute of time?*”

## VI

### Return of Doubts

As soon as Major James opened his eyes and saw his watch, he urged the Yambooshi to hurry on with his experi-

ment, but suddenly he uttered a cry of horror and despair, as if remembering all that he had seen, and remained speechless, the picture of human ruin amid a world of death and desolation. A hopeless gloom seemed to settle over him. Then came a reaction as sudden and violent as the grief itself. 'How could I see all that I have seen in less than half a minute?' he exclaimed. 'The vision is as lying as it is horrid. The Yamabooshi has used some infernal drug and contrived to make me lose my consciousness for a few seconds. The whole thing is an idiotic cheating of my senses, a meaningless dream evoked by weeks of incertitude and mental depression. Away with all such visions. I believe them not. I shall leave the place.'

With these words, the Major got up from the settee and found the Yamabooshi still standing in the same position as when he had placed the mirror in his hands, and looking at him in dignified silence. The Professor, whose countenance was beaming with sympathy, approached him, and gently laying his hands on him said, 'Friend, you must not leave this place before you have been completely purified of your contact with the lower spirits who had to be used to guide your inexperienced soul to the places you craved to see. The entrance to your Inner Self must be closed against their dangerous intrusion. Lose no time, my friend, and allow the holy Master to purify you at once.'

But nothing can be more deaf than anger once aroused, and white with rage the Major roundly rebuked all the three Indians — 'It is all a fraud, I assure you. That Yamabooshi is an imposter. I shall leave immediately, even if I were to forfeit my whole life as a penalty,' blurted out the Major.

"You will repent it the whole of your life if you go before the holy man has shut every entrance in you against intruders ever on the watch and ready to enter the open door," warned the Yogi.

The Major interrupted him with a brutal laugh, and a still more brutal inquiry about the fees he was expected to give to the Yamabooshi for his experiment.

"He needs no reward," said the Professor, "He is above all terrestrial and venal desires. Insult him not, the good man who agreed to help you out of pure sympathy for a suffering fellow man."

The Major glared on the Professor, and as he was turning against the Yamabooshi, he found him mysteriously gone.

Wondering, but still full of doubts and a determined will to regard the whole vision as a fancy of overwrought mind, the Major walked out, the Yogi and the Professor accompanying him down the hill road.

"Shall I believe, Professor," said the Major, interrupting the silence between them, "that there is anything in me which can act and see independently of my physical senses? It is absurd to think that there are some airy entities which have guided my 'soul' in the unpleasant dream. I regard it as a personal insult to the intellect of man, to speak of invisible creatures, subjective intelligences, and all that kind of insane superstition."

The Yogi and the Professor allowed the Major to rave and argue. They said not a word.

"I will not believe," continued the Major, "but as I can no longer bear such uncertainty about my sister and her family, I shall contrive to return home at the earliest opportunity."

"Friend of a foreign land," cried the Yogi, "I pray that before you leave this land, you allow the Yamabooshi to protect you against intrusion of the spirits who have found entrance into you. Let me beseech you, an older man who wishes you well, to submit yourself to the process of purification."

"May I speak?" asked the Professor with an earnest pitying look on his face.

"Go on and have your say," was the ungracious assent, "but let me warn you that nothing you can say will make me a believer in your disgraceful superstitions."

The Professor was silent. "Lend me your ear, good sir, for the last time," said the Yogi, "learn that unless the holy and venerable man, who to relieve your distress, opened your 'soul vision,' is permitted to complete his work, your future life will be little worth living. He has to safeguard you against involuntary repetitions of horrible visions which will harass and persecute you to the verge of insanity. Be warned betimes. It is for your good."

"If you knew the experiment to be so dangerous why did you submit me to it at all?" asked the Major.

"It was to last but a few seconds, and no evil could have resulted from it, had you kept your promise to submit to purification," was the sad reply. "The experiment is harmless when directed by one who knows, and becomes dangerous only when the final precaution is neglected. It is the 'Master of Visions,' he who has opened an entrance into your soul, who has to close it by using the Seal of Purification against any further and deliberate ingress of - -"

"The 'Master of Visions?' cried the Major, 'say rather the Master of Imposture!'"

"Farewell, then!" said the Yogi, and the Professor, in spite of the impolite behaviour of the Major, shook him warmly by the hand in parting, and said, "If at any time you need my help, don't hesitate to ask for it. Good night! I hope we meet before you leave India."

## VII

### The Major Departs—but not Alone

Several days later, Major James was allowed to return home by plane. During the time he was in Karachi, he

never saw the Professor who on his part had been seriously offended by the Major's insulting remarks about the Yamabooshi. On the voyage home, Major James persisted in believing that the vision which the Yamabooshi had called before his eyes was a hoax and that he would find his sister and family all in good health and happy. But he had not been two days in the air before he had cause to remember the words of warning that had been uttered by the Yogi and the Professor. On the second night of his voyage home, he was disturbed by oppressive, and at times horrible, dreams; and the next day, he often found himself absent from the surrounding scenes. Sometimes, all of a sudden the familiar faces of fellow passengers assumed in his eyes the most grotesque appearance. One was suddenly changed into the exact likeness of his dead father, and by the side of another he found the villainous face of a Malay thief whom the passenger had once caught in Singapore and lodged in gaol. He kept silent about such hallucinations, but they became more and more frequent, and he could not find any explanation for them in his medical books.

One night, Major James was abruptly awakened by a long and loud cry of distress. It was a woman's voice, plaintive like that of a child, full of terror and helpless despair. He awoke and saw himself on land, in a strange room. A young girl, almost a child, was desperately struggling against a powerful middle-aged man who had surprised her in her own room, and during sleep. Behind the closed door, he saw listening an old woman whose face, notwithstanding the fiendish expression on it, seemed familiar to him. He immediately recognized it; it was the face of the Jewess who had adopted his niece in the vision he had seen at Karachi. The Jewess had received gold for her share in the foul crime, but who was the victim? Oh! horror unspeakable—he found it was his own child niece. He rushed to

her rescue and seized the wanton beast by the neck. But the man heeded not his powerful grasp, he seemed not even to feel his hand. The coward, seeing himself resisted by the girl, lifted his arm, and the thick fist, coming down upon the sunny locks, felled the child to the ground. Major James sprang upon the leud beast and sought to throttle him, but then, for the first time he observed that he, a shadow himself, was grasping another shadow. His loud shrieks and imprecations had awakened all the passengers in the plane. On explanations, they were attributed to a nightmare, and the Major did not seek to take any one into his confidence. But from that day, his life became a long series of tortures; he could hardly shut his eyes without becoming witness of some horrible deed, some scene of misery, death or crime — past, present and future (as he ascertained later on). Had the Yamabooshi foreseen all this? Was it true that the Yamabooshi experiment had left an 'ingress,' 'a door open' in his soul for some mocking fiends? This reflection was immediately stopped by the Major's sceptic assertion, "Nonsense! There must be some physiological, abnormal change in me." He could not bring himself to believe, even for a moment, in the existence of spirits, good or bad. He recalled to his mind all the arguments he had read in Voltaire, Rousseau, Hume and others against faith in such superstitions, but one day he saw every fellow passenger carrying a halo round his head, and inside the halo of another sceptic passenger he saw the words "scepticism makes him mad." He had become a clairvoyant seeing the thoughts of all the people around him traced in their "auras." He cursed the Yamabooshi for having wrought this change in him, but his heart was getting sick with an unknown fear, and full of the blackest presentiments. His nervous and mental prostration became intensified day by day.

The night before they expected to land in America, Major James had a dream. He fancied he was dead, but an entity whom he realized as himself, hovered over his dead body, and seemed to think and feel and function apart from the body. He tried to go and touch his brain believing that his thoughts and feelings were due to the still persisting activity of the brain. But he found that the blood had congealed within the cranial cavity, and the brain tissues would no longer permit any molecular action. How was the phenomena to be accounted for? What did it signify? Major James, the great doubting medico, could no longer deny the independent nature of his consciousness. But is it eternal? If it is, whence does it come, when did it appear, if it is not part of the cold body lying there? And whither does it take me? "Am I seeing now that there is soul in man, which does not expire with the body? Is there any truth in the doctrine of Reincarnation? All these questions, Major James felt he was discussing in his dream, while his body lay dead and apart from him. But at the end of the dream, he again seemed to revert to his habitual scepticism—"A soul? I deny this. My Soul, my vital soul, or the spirit of life, has expired with my body, with the grey matter of my brain."

## VIII

### A Tale of Woe

On a sunny morning, the plane alighted at the Miami aerodrome, and Major James immediately took train for Detroit. Half an hour after his arrival, the last doubts with regard to the correctness of his vision had disappeared. The reality was worse than any imaginings could have made it. He found that he had seen the terrible tragedy with all



its heart-rending details—his brother-in-law killed in the wheels of a machine, his sister insane and now rapidly sinking toward her end, his niece — the sweetest flower of nature's fairest work — dishonoured in a den of infamy, the seven little children dead of a contagious disease in an orphanage, his last surviving nephew at sea, no one knew where, a whole house, a home of love and peace, scattered, and he left alone, a witness of a world of desolation and dishonour. The news filled him with infinite despair, and he sank helpless, the shock proving too much. The last thing he heard before entirely losing consciousness was a remark of a local official, "Had you before leaving India, cabled to the city authorities of your whereabouts and of your intention of coming home to take charge of your young relatives, we might have placed them elsewhere and thus have saved them from their fate. No one in this city knew that the children had a well-to-do relative. They were left paupers and had to be treated as such. They were comparatively strangers in Detroit, and under the circumstances you could have hardly expected anything else..... I can only express my sincere sorrow."

The knowledge that he could have saved, at any rate, his young niece from her unmerited fate, but that through his unbelief and neglect he had not done so, now haunted Major James night and day. If he had believed the vision and cabled to Detroit previous to his return much might have been avoided. It was all this, coupled with the fact that he could no longer doubt clairvoyance and clair-audience, that brought him so heavily down on his knees—He cursed his stubborn scepticism, his denial of facts, his early education, he cursed himself and the whole world.....

For several days he contrived not to sink beneath his load, for he had a duty to perform to the dead and to the living. But his sister once rescued from the pauper's asylum,

placed under the care of the best physicians, with her daughter to attend to her last moments, and the Jewess safely lodged in gaol, his fortitude and strength suddenly abandoned him. Hardly a week after his arrival, he was himself no better than a raving maniac, helpless in the strong grip of a brain fever. For several weeks he lay between life and death,, the terrible disease defying the skill of the best physicians. At last his strong constitution prevailed, and they proclaimed him safe. But he heard the verdict with a bleeding heart. Doomed to drag the loathsome burden of life henceforth alone, and in constant remorse; hoping for no help on earth; and still refusing to believe in the possibility of anything better than a short survival of consciousness beyond the grave, his unexpected return to life added one more drop of gall to his bitter feelings. During the still hours of night, he found himself led to his sister's bedside, forced to watch there hour after hour, and see the silent disintegration of her wasted frame; to witness and feel the sufferings which her own tenantless brain could no longer reflect. But there was something still more horrible to barb the dart that could never be extricated. He had to look, by day, at the childish innocent face of his young niece, so sublimely simple and guileless in her pollution; and to witness, by night, how the full knowledge and recollection of her dishonour, of her young life now for ever blasted, came to her in her dreams as soon as she was asleep. These dreams took an objective form to Major James; he had to live them over, again, night after night, and feel the same terrible despair. He now mourned over his proud folly in neglecting to avail himself, at Karachi, of the proffered purification.

At last, the poor insane martyr dropped into her dark and now welcome grave, leaving behind her, but for a few short weeks, her young, her first-born, daughter. Consumption

made short work of that tender frame. Hardly four months after his return to America, Major James was left alone in the whole wide world, his only surviving nephew having expressed a desire to follow his sea-faring career. A wreck, a prematurely old man, looking at forty as though sixty winters had passed over his doomed head he suddenly formed a desperate resolution. He would return to India and seek out the Yamabooshi, and falling prostrate at his feet would entreat him to recall the Frankenstein he had raised. A fortnight later, he was in Karachi. He immediately sought the home of his Professor friend who unfortunately was not in Karachi at the time. The Professor's wife and children were surprised at the change in the Major, and made him feel as comfortable as of old, but he found no rest. He was all the time fidgetting and inquiring when the Professor was expected back. He was told it would be in a few days, and he heaved a sigh of relief. When the Professor arrived, Major Williams told him the whole story of the tragedy of his life, and wanted to meet the Yamabooshi. The Professor took the Major to the Yogi, and all the three drove to the lonely hilltop beyond the Central Jail. The Yamabooshi had left the place a week back, and he had left no trace of his whereabouts. This brought a new fit of despair into the mind of the Major, and he was about to swoon when his Indian friends held him up and soon revived him.

"My dear Major, I really cannot bear to see you in such distress. Put your mind at ease for some time, and I hope we shall be able to bring relief to your tortured soul," consoled the Professor.

"According to the laws of occult science, it is only that Yamabooshi who opened the soul of the Major to visions that can close it back. Others are helpless. Our only hope lies in finding out the identical holy man. In the meanwhile,

I would advise the Major to seek relief in a believing open minded study of the occult sciences, and these, revealing a world of inner law in the world of men, will give him that alchemy of faith which transforms sorrow into bliss," said the Yogi.

But relief from the horrible visions of the past came to Major James in an unexpected way. Within a few weeks of his arrival in Karachi, he was sent to somewhere in Assam. One night, as he lay on his bed reading that great revealing gospel of inner life called *The Gita*, he felt as if there was an atmosphere of ineffable peace gathering in the room. He laid aside his book, and closed his eyes to take into the deepest recesses of his soul something of that atmosphere. As soon as he closed his eyes, he seemed to find himself in a dense jungle, ascending by a hill track to a secluded Hindu temple on the top. He entered the temple, and lo and behold! the Yamabooshi was there in deep meditation. Major James saw, in the vision, how the Yamabooshi's soul ascended in resplendent colours out of his body, and disappeared into thin air. After some time, he saw it returning to the body, and the eyes of the Yamabooshi opened, and there was such a deep well of compassion in his eyes that the Major prostrated himself before the holy man and stayed there for a long time with the hands of the Yamabooshi held in blessing over his head.

Just at this point of vision, there was a knock at the door of Major's room, and he rose from his bed, unwillingly, to open it. A bearer handed a letter to him, and he closed the door to read. It was, very strangely, a letter purporting to be written by the Yamabooshi.

It read as under :—

"My son, I have watched you all the time in your home country and here. Having opened your soul vision, I am responsible for your welfare on the path of soul-life. I felt

your approach to my sanctuary, and I am glad you are so near. Come and meet me to-morrow at the setting of the sun, and by the Grace of God, your troubles will ease."

Major James felt that a day of happiness was dawning on him, and he could hardly sleep that night. Next day, every one found him unusually cheerful, and at the setting of the sun he was at the feet of the Yamabooshi who spread the hands of blessing over his head.

"Rise, my son, you have suffered greatly, and suffering is always a step to illumination, to the life of the spirit. In this life, since you rejected the offer of immediate purification, you can never expect a permanent cure for the tormenting visions. But I shall teach you a simple mantram which, if recited in earnest faith, will make the ingress of lower spirits into your soul more and more difficult. For the rest, put your faith more in Heart-learning than in Head-learning. Ignorance is like unto a closed and airless vessel in which the soul sits shut up within. It warbles not, nor can it stir a feather, but the songster mute and torpid sits and of exhaustion dies. Your Head-learning is ignorance, with no Wisdom to illumine and guide the soul — and the soul of the West, encaged in the pride of Intellect is dying of exhaustion. But a few chosen spirits from your land will learn wisdom, and usher in a new era of wisdom in the West. Perhaps you will be among those few pioneers."

The Major rose and stood in reverent submission before the Yamabooshi who taught him the spell which would ease his trouble. The Major bowed to the hoy man and went out a new man with a good deal of the load of earthly sorrow lifted from him—now ever approaching in a spirit of humble pupilship all the teachings of the Eastern faiths without renouncing the religion of Christ, into which in fact he read new meanings and loftier concepts the more he delved into the science and practice of soul-Wisdom, as taught by the seers of ancient India.

The last words which the Yamabooshi uttered to the Major as a light to lead him on to the paths of wisdom, are still a great solace and comfort to him in his struggles with the old doubting scientist soul.

"Mind is like a mirror, it gathers dust while it reflects. It needs the gentle breezes of Soul-Wisdom to brush away the dust of our illusions. Seek, oh friend of a foreign land, to blend thy Mind and Soul. Avert thy face from world deceptions; mistrust thy senses, they are false. But within thy body—the shrine of thy sensations—seek in the Impersonal for the 'eternal man,' and having sought him out, look inwards, and thou can be a Budha one day."

## **DOUGHBOY OF DELHI**

and

**Other Tales of Hidden India**

by

**PROFESSOR B. J. VASWANI**

This is a companion volume to "Major's Nightmare" and other tales.

The first tale is a sensational story of mysterious happenings in the life of an American Army Officer stationed in Delhi, and how he is led to retrace his "previous lives" in India, and meets his old love in India, through a series of thrilling adventures.

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**Will be Shortly Ready**

# THE MONKEY'S PAW

Without, the night was cold and wet, but in the small parlour of Laburnum Villa the blinds were drawn and the fire burned brightly. Father and son were at chess; the former, who possessed ideas about the game involving radical changes, putting his king into such sharp and unnecessary perils that it even provoked comment from the white-haired old lady knitting placidly by the fire.

"Hark at the wind," said Mr. White, who, having seen a fatal mistake after it was too late, was amiably desirous of preventing his son from seeing it.

"I'm listening," said the latter, grimly surveying the board as he stretched out his hand. "Check."

"I should hardly think that he'd come to-night," said his father, with his hand poised over the board.

"Mate," replied the son.

"That's the worst of living so far out," bawled Mr. White, with sudden and unlooked-for violence; "of all the beastly, slushy, out-of-the-way places to live in, this is the worst. Path's a bog, and the road's a torrent. I don't know what people are thinking about. I suppose because only two houses on the road are let, they think it doesn't matter."

"Never mind, dear," said his wife soothingly; "perhaps you'll win the next one."

Mr. White looked up sharply, just in time to intercept a knowing glance between mother and son. The words died away on his lips, and he hid a guilty grin in his thin grey beard.

"There he is," said Herbert White, as the gate banged so loudly and heavy footsteps came toward the door.

The old man rose with hospitable haste, and opening the door, was heard condoling with the new arrival. The new

arrival also condoled with himself, so that Mrs. White said, "Tut, tut!" and coughed gently as her husband entered the room, followed by a tall, burly man, beady of eye and rubicund of visage.

"Sergeant-Major Morris," he said, introducing him.

The sergeant-major shook hands, and taking the proffered seat by the fire, watched contentedly while his host got out whisky and tumblers and stood a small copper kettle on the fire.

At the third glass his eyes got brighter, and he began to talk, the little family circle regarding with eager interest this visitor from distant parts, as he squared his broad shoulders in the chair, and spoke of wild scenes and doughty deeds; of wars and plagues, and strange peoples.

"Twenty-one years of it," said Mr. White, nodding at his wife and son. "When he went away he was a slip of a youth in the warehouse. Now look at him."

"He don't look to have taken much harm," said Mrs. White politely.

"I'd like to go to India myself," said the old man, "just to look round a bit, you know."

"Better where you are," said the sergeant-major, shaking his head. He put down the empty glass, and sighing softly, shook it again.

"I should like to see those old temples and fakirs and jugglers," said the old man. "What was that you started telling me the other day about a monkey's paw or something, Morris?"

"Nothing," said the soldier hastily. "Leastways nothing worth hearing."

"Monkey's paw?" said Mrs. White curiously.

"Well, it's just a bit of what you might call magic, perhaps," said the sergeant-major off-handedly.

His three listeners leaned forward eagerly. The visitor



absent-mindedly put his empty glass to his lips and then set it down again. His host filled it for him.

"To look at," said the sergeant-major, fumbling in his pocket, "It's just an ordinary little paw, dried to a mummy."

He took something out of his pocket and proffered it. Mrs. White drew back with a grimace, but her son, taking it, examined it curiously.

"And what is there special about it?" inquired Mr. White as he took it from his son, and having examined it, placed it upon the table.

"It had a spell put on it by an old fakir," said the sergeant-major, "a very holy man. He wanted to show that fate ruled people's lives, and that those who interfered with it did so to their sorrow. He put a spell on it so that three separate men could each have three wishes from it."

His manner was so impressive that his hearers were conscious that their light laughter jarred somewhat.

"Well, why don't you have three, sir?" said Herbert White cleverly.

The soldier regarded him in the way that middle age is wont to regard presumptuous youth. "I have," he said quietly, and his blotchy face whitened.

"And did you really have the three wishes granted?" asked Mrs. White.

"I did," said the sergeant-major, and his glass tapped against his strong teeth.

"And has anybody else wished?" persisted the old lady.

"The first man had his three wishes. Yes," was the reply; "I don't know what the first two were, but the third was for death. That's how I got the paw."

His tones were so grave that a hush fell upon the group.

"If you've had your three wishes, it's no good to you now then, Morris," said the old man at last. "What do you keep it for?"

The soldier shook his head. "Fancy, I suppose," he said slowly. "I did have some idea of selling it, but I don't think I will. It has caused enough mischief already. Besides, people won't buy. They think it's a fairy tale, some of them; and those who do think anything of it want to try it first and pay me afterward."

"If you could have another three wishes," said the old man eyeing him keenly, "would you have them?"

"I don't know," said the other. "I don't know."

He took the paw, and dangling it between his forefinger and thumb, suddenly threw it upon the fire. White, with a slight cry, stopped down and snatched it off.

"Better let it burn," said the soldier solemnly.

"If you don't want it, Morris," said the other, "give it to me."

"I won't" said his friend doggedly. "I threw it on the fire. If you keep it, don't blame me for what happens. Pitch it on the fire again like a sensible man."

The other shook his head and examined his new possession closely. "How do you do it?" he inquired.

"Hold it up in your right hand and wish aloud," said the sergeant-major, "but I warn you of the consequences."

"Sounds like the *Arabian Nights*," said Mrs. White, as she rose and began to set the supper. "Don't you think you might wish for four pairs of hands for me?"

Her husband drew the talisman from his pocket, and then all three burst into laughter as the sergeant-major, with a look of alarm on his face, caught him by the arm.

"If you must wish," he said gruffly, "wish for something sensible."

Mr. White dropped it back in his pocket, and placing chairs, motioned his friend to the table. In the business of supper the talisman was partly forgotten, and afterward the three sat listening in an enthralled fashion to a second instalment of the soldier's adventures in India.

"If the tale about the monkey's paw is not more truthful than those he has been telling us," said Herbert, as the door closed behind their guest, just in time to catch the last train, "we shan't make much out of it."

"Did you give him anything for it?" inquired Mrs. White, regarding her husband closely.

"A trifle," said he, colouring slightly. "He didn't want it, but I made him take it. And he pressed me again to throw it away."

"Likely," said Herbert, with pretended horror. "Why, we're going to be rich, and famous, and happy. Wish to be an emperor, father, to begin with; then you can't be hen-pecked."

He darted round the table, pursued by the maligned Mrs. White armed with an antimacassar.

Mr. White took the paw from his pocket and eyed it dubiously. "I don't know what to wish for, and that's a fact," he said slowly. "It seems to me I've got all I want"

"If you only cleared the house, you'd be quite happy, wouldn't you!" said Herbert, with his hand on his shoulder. "Well, wish for two hundred pounds, then; that'll just do it."

His father, smiling shamefacedly at his own credulity, held up the talisman, as his son, with a solemn face, somewhat marred by a wink at his mother, sat down at the piano and struck a few impressive chords.

"I wish for two hundred pounds," said the old man distinctly.

A fine crash from the piano greeted the words, interrupted by a shuddering cry from the old man. His wife and son ran toward him.

"It moved," he cried, with a glance of disgust at the object as it lay on floor. "As I wished, it twisted in my hand like a snake."

"Well, I don't see the money," said his son, as he picked it up and placed it on the table, "and I bet I never shall."

"It must have been your fancy, father," said his wife, regarding him anxiously.

He shook his head. "Never mind, though; there's no harm done, but it gave me a shock all the same."

They sat down by the fire again while the two men finished their pipes. Outside, the wind was higher than ever, and the old man started nervously at the sound of a door banging upstairs. A silence unusual and depressing settled upon all three, which lasted until the old couple rose to retire for the night.

"I expect you'll find the cash tied up in a big bag in the middle of your bed," said Herbert, as he bade them good-night, "and something horrible squatting up on top of the wardrobe watching you as you pocket your ill-gotten gains."

He sat alone in the darkness, gazing at the dying fire, and seeing faces in it. The last face was so horrible and so simian that he gazed at it in amazement. It got so vivid that with a little uneasy laugh, he felt on the table for a glass containing a little water to throw over it. His hand grasped the monkey's paw, and with a little shiver he wiped his hand on his coat and went up to bed.

## II

In the brightness of the wintry sun next morning as it streamed over the breakfast table he laughed at his fears. There was an air of prosaic wholesomeness about the room which it had lacked on the previous night, and the dirty, shrivelled little paw was pitched on the sideboard with a carelessness which betokened no great belief in its virtues.

"I suppose all old soldiers are the same," said Mrs.

White. "The idea of our listening to such nonsense! How could wishes be granted in these days? And if they could, how could two hundred pounds hurt you, father?"

"Might drop on his head from the sky," said the frivolous Herbert.

"Morris said the things happened so naturally," said his father, "that you might if you so wished attribute it to coincidence."

"Well, don't break into the money before I come back," said Herbert as he rose from the table. "I'm afraid it'll turn you into a mean, avaricious man, and we shall have to disown you."

His mother laughed, and following him to the door, watched him down the road; and returning to the breakfast table, was very happy at the expense of her husband's credulity. All of which did not prevent her from scurrying to the door at the postman's knock, nor prevent her from referring somewhat shortly to retired sergeant-majors of bibulous habits when she found that the post brought a tailor's bill.

"Herbert will have some more of his funny remarks I expect, when he comes home," she said, as they sat at dinner.

"I dare say," said Mr. White, pouring himself out some beer; "but for all that, the thing moved in my hand; that I'll swear to."

"You thought it did," said the old lady soothingly.

"I say it did," replied the other. "There was no thought about it; I had just—What's the matter?"

His wife made no reply. She was watching the mysterious movements of a man outside, who, peering in an undecided fashion at the house, appeared to be trying to make up his mind to enter. In mental connection with the two hundred pounds, she noticed that the stranger was well

dressed, and wore a silk hat of glossy newness. Three times he paused at the gate, and then walked up the path. Mrs. White at the same moment placed her hands behind her, and hurriedly unfastening the strings of her apron, put that useful article of apparel beneath the cushion of her chair.

She brought the stranger, who seemed ill at ease, into the room. He gazed at her furtively and listened in a preoccupied fashion as the old lady apologised for the appearance of the room, and her husband's coat, a garment which he usually reserved for the garden. She then waited as patiently as her sex would permit for him to broach his business, but he was at first strangely silent.

"I—was asked to call," he said at last, and stooped and picked a piece of cotton from his trousers. "I come from Maw and Meggins."

The old lady started. "Is anything the matter?" she asked breathlessly. "Has anything happened to Herbert? What it is? What it is?"

Her husband interposed. "There, there, mother," he said hastily. "Sit down, and don't jump to conclusions. You've not brought bad news, I'm sure, sir"; and he eyed the other wistfully.

"I'm sorry——" began the visitor.

"Is he hurt?" demanded the mother wildly.

The visitor bowed in assent. "Badly hurt," he said quietly, "but he is not in any pain."

"Oh, thank God!" said the old woman, clasping her hands. "Thank God for that! Thank——"

She broke off suddenly as the sinister meaning of the assurance dawned upon her, and she saw the awful confirmation of her fears in the other's averted face. She caught her breath, and turning to her slower-witted husband, laid her trembling old hand upon his. There was a long silence.

"He was caught in the machinery," said the visitor at length in a low voice.

"Caught in the machinery," repeated Mr. White, in a dazed fashion, "yes."

He sat staring blankly out at the window, and taking his wife's hand between his own, pressed it as he had been wont to do in their old courting days nearly forty years before.

"He was the only one left to us," he said, turning gently to the visitor. "It is hard."

The other coughed, and rising, walked slowly to the window.

"The firm wished me to convey their sincere sympathy with you in your great loss," he said, without looking round. "I beg that you will understand I am only their servant and merely obeying orders."

There was no reply; the old woman's face was white, her eyes staring, and her breath inaudible; on the husband's face was a look such as his friend the sergeant might have carried into his first action.

"I was to say that Maw and Meggins disclaim all responsibility," continued the other. "They admit no liability at all, but in consideration of your son's services, they wish to present you with a certain sum as compensation."

Mr. White dropped his wife's hand, and rising to his feet, gazed with a look of horror at his visitor. His dry lips shaped the words, "How much?"

"Two hundred pounds," was the answer.

Unconscious of his wife's shriek, the old man smiled faintly, put out his hands like a sightless man, and dropped, a senseless heap, to the floor.

### III

In the huge new cemetery, some two miles distant, the old people buried their dead, and came back to the house steeped

in shadow and silence. It was all over so quickly that at first they could hardly realise it, and remained in a state of expectation as though of something else to happen—something else which was to lighten this load, too heavy for old hearts to bear.

But the days passed, and expectation gave place to resignation—the hopeless resignation of the old, sometimes miscalled apathy. Sometimes they hardly exchanged a word, for now they had nothing to talk about, and their days were long to weariness.

It was about a week after, that the old man, waking suddenly in the night, stretched out his hand and found himself alone. The room was in darkness, and the sound of subdued weeping came from the window. He raised himself in bed and listened.

"Come back," he said tenderly. "You will be cold."

"It is colder for my son," said the old woman, and wept afresh.

The sound of her sobs died away on his ears. The bed was warm, and his eyes heavy with sleep. He dozed fitfully, and then slept until a sudden wild cry from his wife awoke him with a start.

"*The paw!*" she cried wildly. "The monkey's paw!"

He started up in alarm. "Where? Where is it? What's the matter?"

She came stumbling across the room toward him. "I want it," she said quietly. "You've not destroyed it?"

"It's in the parlour, on the bracket," he replied, marveling. "Why?"

She cried and laughed together, and bending over, kissed his cheek.

"I only just thought of it," she said hysterically. "Why didn't I think of it before? Why didn't *you* think of it?"

"Think of what?" he questioned.



"The other two wishes," she replied rapidly. "We've only had one."

"Was that not enough?" he demanded fiercely.

"No," she cried triumphantly; "we'll have one more. Go down and get it quickly, and wish our boy alive again."

The man sat up in bed and flung the bed clothes from his quaking limbs. "Good God, you are mad!" he cried, aghast.

"Get it," she panted; "get it quickly, and wish— Oh, my boy, my boy!"

Her husband struck a match and lit the candle. "Get back to bed," he said unsteadily. "You don't know what you are saying."

"We had the first wish granted," said the old woman feverishly; "why not the second?"

"A coincidence," stammered the old man.

"Go and get it and wish," cried his wife, quivering with excitement.

The old man turned and regarded her, and his voice shook. "He has been dead ten days, and besides he—I would not tell you else, but—I could only recognize him by his clothing. If he was too terrible for you to see then, how now?"

"Bring him back," cried the old woman, and dragged him toward the door. "Do you think I fear the child I have nursed?"

He went down in the darkness and felt his way to the parlour, and then to the mantelpiece. The talisman was in its place, and a horrible fear that the unspoken wish might bring his mutilated son before him ere he could escape from the room seized upon him, and he caught his breath as he found that he had lost the direction of the door. His brow cold with sweat, he felt his way round the table, and groped along the wall until he found himself

in the small passage with the unwholesome thing in his hand.

Even his wife's face seemed changed as he entered the room. It was white and expectant, and to his fears seemed to have an unnatural look upon it. He was afraid of her.

"*Wish!*" she cried, in a strong voice.

"It is foolish and wicked," he faltered.

"*Wish!*" repeated his wife.

He raised his hand. "I wish my son alive again."

The talisman fell to the floor, and he regarded it fearfully. Then he sank trembling into a chair as the old woman, with burning eyes, walked to the window and raised the blind.

He sat until he was chilled with the cold, glancing occasionally at the figure of the old woman peering through the window. The candle-end, which had burned below the rim of the china candlestick, was throwing pulsating shadows on the ceiling and walls, until, with a flicker larger than the rest it expired. The old man, with an unspeakable sense of relief at the failure of the talisman, crept back to his bed, and a minute or two afterward the old woman came silently and apathetically beside him.

Neither spoke, but lay silently listening to the ticking of the clock. A stair creaked, and a squeaky mouse scurried noisily through the wall. The darkness was oppressive, and after lying for some time screwing up his courage, he took the box of matches, and striking one, went downstairs for a candle.

At the foot of the stairs the match went out, and he paused to strike another; and at the same moment a knock, so quiet and stealthy as to be scarcely audible, sounded on the front door.

The matches fell from his hand and spilled in the passage. He stood motionless, his breath suspended until the knock

was repeated. Then he turned and fled swiftly back to his room, and closed the door behind him. A third knock sounded through the house.

"*What's that?*" cried the old woman, starting up.

"A rat," said the old man in shaking tones—"a rat. It passed me on the stairs."

His wife sat up in bed listening. A loud knock resounded through the house.

"It's Herbert!" she screamed. "It's Herbert!"

She ran to the door, but her husband was before her, and catching her by the arm, held her tightly.

"What are you going to do?" he whispered hoarsely.

"It's my boy; it's Herbert!" she cried, struggling mechanically. "I forgot it was two miles away. What are you holding me for? Let go. I must open the door."

"For God's sake don't let it in," cried the old man, trembling.

"You're afraid of your own son," she cried, struggling. "Let me go. I'm coming, Herbert; I'm coming."

There was another knock, and another. The old woman with a sudden wrench broke free and ran from the room. Her husband followed to the landing, and called after her appealingly as she hurried downstairs. He heard the chain rattle back and the bottom bolt drawn slowly and stiffly from the socket. Then the old woman's voice strained and panting.

"The bolt," she cried loudly. "Come down. I can't reach it."

But her husband was on his hands and knees groping wildly on the floor in search of the paw. If he could only find it before the thing outside got in. A perfect fusillade of knocks reverberated through the house, and he heard the scraping of a chair as his wife put it down in the passage against the door. He heard the creaking of the bolt as it

came slowly back, and at the same moment he found the monkey's paw, and frantically breathed his third and last wish.

The knocking ceased suddenly, although the echoes of it were still in the house. He heard the chair drawn back, and the door opened. A cold wind rushed up the staircase, and a long loud wail of disappointment and misery from his wife gave him courage to run down to her side, and then to the gate beyond. The street lamp flickering opposite shone on a quiet and deserted road.

W. W. Jacobs.

## INDIAN SKETCHES

This little book by Prof. B. J. Vaswani contains 23 drawings, in black and white, of different human types in India—the Gurkhas, the Pathans, the Fakirs, Snake Charmers, Leopard Trainers, Bear men, Assam hill girls, &c &c with illuminating historical and sociological notes.

**Annas Twelve**

# RAIN OF SNAKES

About the year 1920, in India, I found myself a temporary occupant of a lonely bungalow not far from a small cantonment in a wild and hilly part of a native State. My domestic staff included, among others, my butler, a Surti (a Hindu from Surat), and a Pathan syce—a huge, brawny, powerful man.

One peaceful Sabbath morn I was seated in a long chair on my veranda, enjoying my cheroot. I had risen at five, ridden twenty miles or so, had a bath, and given reasonable satisfaction to an excellent appetite. Anon I flung away the end of my cheroot, let the paper fall, and was just dropping off into a delightful nap when I heard a voice.

"Huzoor! Huzoor!" It brought me back from the edge of slumber.

"G'way," I murmured.

"Huzoor! Huzoor!" more loudly insisted the voice, and I shot up from my chair.

## THE EYES OF THE SNAKE-CHARMER.

"What do you want?" I said, quietly, with the courtesy due to myself and the anger I felt.

"I am a snake-charmer," said the man who stood before me at the bottom of the three or four steps that led up to the veranda.

He was a tall, lean Hindu. He carried a long, heavy staff in his hand, and his left steadied a bamboo rod which, resting on his shoulder, supported at either end a large, closely-woven basket. I stared coldly at the man's eyes, which gave back as good a stare as my own—a most unusual thing. There was nothing shifty, humble, or servile about this mendicant.

"I am a snake-charmer, Huzoor," he repeated.

"Well, go and charm them," I requested, "and don't bother me. I don't want to see your show. Go away."

"I do not wish to give a show, Huzoor," replied the man, without budging. "I will charm away all the snakes from your bungalow and compound."

"Charm yourself away," I said, and settled back in my chair. The man did not move, and I closed my eyes again. Was it possible that I closed them in relief from the steady, hypnotic stare of the snake-charmer? Absurd! But he had most remarkable eyes—brilliant, compelling, mesmeric.

"Huzoor! Huzoor!" came the voice again.

"Will you go—while the going's good?" I said. "For the last time, *I do not want to see any snake-charming.*"

"The Presence need not see it," was the immediate reply. "Let the Presence give me five rupees and I will remove the snakes."

I am a patient man. "Give you five rupees to charm away the snakes that are not in my compound?" I said. "I have not seen a snake since I've been here, and I haven't seen a dozen a year since I've been in India."

"I'll risk it," I said.

"Better five rupees than terror—fear—trembling—horror—death," was the reply. "The Huzoor is in great danger, and I alone can save him. Let him beware of the silent, poisoned death."

I rose to my feet, yawned and stretched, descended the three or four steps to where he stood, "Go," I said, and pointed down the drive.

"Does not the Huzoor value his reason and his life at five rupees, even? Or perhaps they are only worth four? Perhaps, the Huzoor's is not a valuable life?"

"Three rupees—for the Huzoor's life. Only three rupees—very cheap," was the answer.

But behind the impudent jeer there was a threat, and there was nothing of jest, flippancy, or mere impudence in the burning eyes that held mine. Going back to the veranda, I called "Boy!" and my butler came hurrying from one of the rooms. "Send this man out of the compound, and see that he doesn't come back," I said, as I returned to my chair.

Sukharam Raoji bustled forward importantly.

"Go away! Get out of it," he ordered.

### HYPNOTISM?

He went to take the man by the arm, to conduct him from the Presence. But he did not take the snake-charmer by the arm, nor conduct him anywhere. The intruder looked at him, and he wilted; hissed a sharp word and fell back; made a motion with his hand, and swiftly retreated up the steps of the veranda, where he stood cowering behind my chair.

This was interesting, but beyond a joke. "You are certainly looking for trouble, my friend," said I to the snake-charmer, "and you're going to find it." And turning to the trembling Sukharam, I said: "Call Roshan Khan."

The butler hurried off, and did not return. Not so the snake-charmer.

"Two rupees," he said, smiling impudently. "Two rupees for the Huzoor's life! Surely it's worth that much! Two rupees to save the Huzoor from being frightened."

I lit another cheroot as Roshan Khan strolled round the corner of the bungalow, tall, erect, swaggering. "Put this man out," I said, "and help him a little way on his journey!"

The big Pathan smiled, and joyously advanced upon the sturdy rogue. What I expected to see was that Roshan Khan, seizing him by the scruff of the neck, would run

him down the drive and propel him into the road. But this was not what happened. The man's glowing eyes fixed those of Roshan Khan. His hand shot out and made passes. He uttered a harsh, peremptory "Stand still!" and Roshan Khan stood still, a look of bewilderment on his face!

The fellow then repeated the word he had spat at Sukharām—a word I did not understand. I rose from my chair, but he turned to me and, half-menacingly, half-jeeringly, said: "One rupee for the Huzoor's life! . . . One rupee to save the Huzoor from being frightened! . . . Only one rupee! . . . Last offer!

"No?" he added, and backed away. "On the Huzoor's head be it." And he strode down the drive.

I turned to the Pathan. "Why didn't you do as I told you, Roshan Khan?" I asked, coldly.

"Sahib?" was the reply. He was like a man waking from sleep.

"Why didn't you throw that man out, as I told you?" I asked. "He was a *budmash*."

"What man, Sahib?" asked Roshan Khan.

"Oh, go away," I replied. It was time to go inside the bungalow, and close doors and shutters until the sun had begun to sink.

#### AFRAID OF THE DARK.

I unfastened a cord from the nail over which the looped end of it was slipped, releasing the big up-rolled "chick," or curtain, made of thin parallel strips of bamboo. This heavy green curtain was some ten feet in length and breadth, and rolled up into a cylinder a foot or more in thickness. As the "chick" moved to descend, something fell from the top of it, striking me on the head and shoulders, curling itself about my neck, writhing, twisting, and *I realized, that it was a snake.*



I snatched at it, and dashed it heavily to the ground before it had had time to strike. I stamped hard with my right foot, and bitterly regretted that I was not wearing my riding-boots. If the reptile had time to strike, socks and russet silk trousers above thin shoes would be no protection.

But my luck was in. My foot was firmly planted a few inches behind the snake's head, and it could only lash and writhe in furious impotence. Putting my weight on my right foot, and slightly bending my right knee, I got a comfortable balance, and slowly raised my left foot from the ground.

#### A TERRIBLE NIGHTMARE.

My task would have been easy enough had the ugly head with its darting tongue protruded from the inner side of my foot, but, as it was, I managed quite satisfactorily. Bringing the left foot across the right, I held it poised for a second, and then stamped heavily. To be on the safe side, I then jumped clear, but found that the snake was in that condition in which it is best for poisonous reptiles to be. Then I retired into my darkened room, and before long discovered that, for the first time, I did not like the *darkened* room—there were too many shadows.

I lay down in my long chair to think, and immediately bounded to my feet, and I'm not sure that I didn't utter a yell as I sprang up. My head had touched something cold, softish, springy, alive, horrible. I struck a match, and found that I was shaking, not so much from fear, I think, as from disgust, horror, anger. There was nothing on the back of the chair where my head had rested. I sat down again . . . .

What was that?

A dry rustle, a sound of a slow, quiet movement across the floor, like—like—well, like the soft, gentle sound of a

snake gliding across the matting. Was it behind me? I leapt up and threw the door open, letting in a flood of light and a wave of superheated air. There was no snake in the room.

What was the matter with me? My bedroom adjoined this central living-room. As I opened the door to enter its slightly cooler darkness I heard behind me a soft thud on to the palm-leaf matting.

I fairly sprang round. There was no illusion about this. A snake had fallen from one of the cross-beams that supported the roof. I stepped swiftly into the bedroom and closed the door. Beside my bed was an electric torch, and with its help I found a leather-covered cane. Armed with torch and stick, I opened the door, and saw something coiled, slender, tapering; and, with a couple of strides and a swift stroke, I brought my stout cane heavily down upon—the thong of my hunting-crop which had fallen from the nail.

#### THE SEVEN-FOOT COBRA.

With feelings too deep for words, I returned to my bedroom, changed into pyjamas, and remarking “Let it *rain* snakes!” threw myself on the bed.

I must have fallen asleep almost immediately, and in that sleep I suffered one of the most ghastly nightmares conceivable, being slowly crushed by a great python, swallowed alive, and remaining buried alive in its interior. I awoke, bathed in perspiration, trembling with horror, and feeling ill.

A bath, tea, and the sounds of life as the servants opened the doors and shutters of the bungalow made me feel better. I would ride over to the links and forget this nonsense in a mighty endeavour to beat bogey—a curiously appropriate phrase.

Having finished tea in the sitting-room, I returned to my bedroom and noticed, in the dim light, that the *hamal* had moved a round black cushion from my chair to the bed. He had not opened the shutters of this room, as the late afternoon sun was shining full upon them.

As I changed into flannels I sat on the edge of the bed, and when I went to the dressing-table mirror to brush my hair I partly opened one side of a shutter that was just behind it. This let a flood of light into the room, and, as I turned from the dressing-table, the cushion on the bed also turned. It turned into a snake, or else it had been a snake the whole time, and I had sat within two feet of it!

I wasn't afraid of the snake, but I was very terribly afraid—of fear; and I earnestly hoped it *was* a snake, and that I was not "seeing things." My camera was hanging on the wall. I would find out whether that "saw things," too. Turning, I slipped it from its case and focused it on the snake, which promptly raised its head.

"Look pleasant," I said, "and keep still." It kept very still, and so did I, until I heard the satisfying click. From force of habit I wound another film into place.

I picked up my cane and advanced upon the enemy. As I came within striking distance he raised his head and drew it back to strike. I struck first, however, bringing the cane from behind my left shoulder, and the evil head dropped as the reptile writhed, with broken neck.

As I rode to the links, followed by Roshan Khan, I wondered what I should do if I encountered that charmer of serpents. I did not do so, perhaps fortunately for both of us. What I did encounter was a lonely golfer seeking an opponent. Curiously enough, I have absolutely forgotten his name. But I have not forgotten the last hole.

My ball was lying in a little rocky depression on the edge of the "green." My opponent's ball lay, very comfortably

placed, on a sandy patch of hard earth a few yards away. Taking his putter, he struck it a gentle blow which would land it in the nearest winding water-channel that sloped gently down from the edge of the green to the sunken three-pound jam-pot that was the flagless hole.

Laughing aloud as the ball meandered inevitably down the rain-made gully, I put my hand into the jam-pot to receive it on its arrival. Gathering speed, the ball arrived, and fell into the pot and my awaiting hand.

As it did so, the dusty bottom of the pot swirled into life, a kind of big watch-spring uncurled, as it were, and became a krait—the smallest and deadliest snake in the world.

As I clenched my fist with the foolish idea of killing it with a crushing pressure, its head darted up between my hand and the side of the jam-jar, and in a second it was over the edge and darting off. The speed with which it moved was astounding, but I had my putter in my right hand and promptly used it for an unorthodox but satisfying stroke.

I rode home feeling very thoughtful indeed, and the night I spent was, perhaps, the worst night of my life: and yet I slept the whole time. But when I awoke I decided that the nightmare I had had made that of the previous afternoon, by comparison, a dream of peace.

As I lay, half awake and half asleep, I heard that dry, rustling sound again—the sound of a snake moving across palm-leaf matting. The sound seemed to come from under my bed,

And then, happily, the fear of being afraid triumphed, and I sprang out of bed, regardless of the fact that my feet were bare. Yes, there he was, the beast—a cobra, sinuously gliding along by the wall, apparently looking for an outlet.

The door was ajar, and both the snake and I appeared to realize the fact simultaneously, for as I stood erect he quickened his leisurely gait and darted straight for the open-

ing. So did I. I acted almost automatically. With one bound I reached the door, a fraction of a second later than the snake's head, and slammed it sharply.

Stooping, I slightly relaxed the pressure of the door that he'd the reptile squirming and thrashing about, and, seizing it with my right hand, drew it gradually into the room, inch by inch, until my hand was behind its head.

I gripped it with all my strength, thrusting my thumb against its throat. Seeing my camera where I had left it, I called for my butler, and stepped out on to the sunlit veranda.

Sukharam Raoji is quite good at photography, providing the camera is standing on a table and his part is confined to pressing the trigger. This snake seemed less interested in having his portrait taken than did he of yesterday. In fact, I think he had fainted, or died from loss of breath, for his seven-foot body had become limp and quiescent.

From that day I never saw another snake in India, and so ended the incident of the truculent snake-charmer, decidedly the most exciting incident of my life.

P. C. Wren.

## LAUGH, SOLDIERS! LAUGH

A book of nearly 300 jokes, funny stories &c to act as a tonic to soldiers and civilians for the achievement of Victory in War. It has also a section on "Laughs from U.S.A."

**Annas Twelve**

# IDOL'S REVENGE

Somewhere in the south of India, not far from a British military station, huge crowds of Indians in multicoloured costumes were wending their way to a river. It was the annual 'Car Festival' when the biggest idol of the most important Hindu temple is placed in a ceremonial car and moved on its huge wooden wheels through the broad thoroughfares of the city to the river and brought back and re-installed in the temple. On its way back, the procession stopped for a while near a restaurant frequented by British soldiers. Three of them came out to see the god for themselves. William Jones (Bill) who had been, in his civilian days before the war, a jeweller's assistant in London, was astounded at the size and brilliance of the two rubies which formed the eyes of the god in the car.

"Those two eyes of that there god could make a millionaire of any one of us," said Bill, "I've never seen such rubies before. In any city of Europe, they would fetch fabulous prices."

"It's a pity they are wasted on such a black monster as that grinning deity of these yelling savages," replied Albert Thomas, one of his two companions.

"If what Bill says about their value is a fair estimate, it will be so splendid to try to get at them. What do you say, Bill?" asked Jacob Smith (Sniggers).

"I am game for the sport, if you two will help," replied Bill, with a twinkle of new adventure in his eyes.

"I am willing," responded Sniggers.

"So am I," said Albert.

And they shook hands heartily over the words.

A few days later, the entire Hindu public was aghast at the news splashed across the top of all provincial papers

that the famous rubies of the god in the Kali Temple were missing. The local police was immediately on the scene, and after ten days of fruitless search everywhere, no trace of the rubies was found. Then the priests of the Temple took a hand in the investigation. The three British soldiers were sure the police having failed, the priests could do nothing, and they began once more to move about the city. One evening, as they sat at a table in their favourite cafe in the city, they found a half-naked Indian, with strange sandal-painted marks on his forehead and sacred thread loosely hanging from his shoulder, in animated conversation with the Indian manager of the cafe. After some time, when the soldiers had almost forgotten his existence, they saw him approaching their table, and as soon as they lifted up their faces to have a full look at him, he seemed for a moment to narrow his eyelids and then to startle as if in sudden discovery. But he seemed immediately to control himself, and then sat down to a table nearby, sipping coffee and counting the beads of his rosary—not without an occasional furtive look at the British soldiers.

The soldiers rose, paid their bill to the cashier, and went up to the manager.

“Who is that fellow there, with white marks on his forehead and all that?” asked Bill of the manager.

“He is one of the priests of the Kali Temple. He says that he has seen in a vision the faces of the thieves who stole the rubies.”

“Why is he here this evening?” asked Sniggers.

“It seems the Police have allowed the priests of the temple to go to all places where they expect to find the thieves. We protested but could do nothing to prevent his visit to the cafe,” answered the Manager.

“These priests seem to be full of superstitions. Do you think they will find the thieves?” asked Albert.

"The priests are reputed to be in possession of supernatural powers, and it looks as if they have already got some clue about the identity of the thieves."

The three soldiers laughed a boisterous laugh, and went out. As they were hailing a taxi that night to drive them to their camp, an Indian in yellow robes whom they had noticed following them all along, presented himself before the car, and in very suppliant tones asked for *bakshish*.

"Jao," said all the three and the taxi moved, but the soldiers could not help noticing a weird sort of malignant scowl on the face of the faqir.

That same night, Sniggers suffered from a very disturbed sleep. At one time, he felt as if there was somebody stealthily moving about his room, and even slipping his hand below his pillow. At another, he seemed to see the face of the naked Indian priest framed in the glass pane of a window in front of his bed. He jumped out of his bed and opened the window, only to find a dark figure disappearing into the dark. Next morning, Sniggers told his companions about his nightmare, and they treated the whole matter as the result of fright. Now, it was a practice between the three accomplices to keep the rubies turn by turn. Next night, it was Albert's turn, and strange things happened to him, as also to Bill the third night—and every day as they went about the town they felt they were being shadowed by mysterious men in out-of-way places and at unexpected moments. Their nerves were weakening, and their room mates began to feel they were a nuisance in the night, sitting up in their beds, sometimes getting out of beds at inconvenient hours, switching the lights on, and occasionally shouting for help against imaginary intruders. The matter was reported to the officers, and all the three, allowing the impression to gather strength, were sent to a hospital, and eventually back home for respite.



Here they unburdened their soul to a crook (Toff) of their acquaintance, who advised them to accompany him to an out-of-the-way hotel to mature their plans for the safe keeping of the rubies for some time, and its eventual sale at good price. It was at this hotel that the most sensational incidents took place.

About 9 o'clock in the night, after a few days of minor mysteries when they had occasionally ventured out to Hull, Toff was reading a paper, and Sniggers and Bill were talking, while Albert sat apart.

Sniggers who had been feeling, for some time now, doubtful about Toff's plans said "What's his idea, I wonder?" and Bill replied, "I don't know."

SNIGGERS. And how much longer will he keep us here?

BILL. We've been here three days.

SNIGGERS. And 'aven't seen a soul.

BILL. It's lonely enough.

SNIGGERS. 'Ow long did you rent the room for, Toff?

TOFF *continued to read a sporting paper; he took no notice of what was said.*

SNIGGERS. 'E's *such* a toff.

BILL. Yet 'e's clever, no mistake.

SNIGGERS. Those clever ones are the beggars to make a muddle. Their plans are clever enough, but they don't work, and then they make a mess of things much worse than you or me.

BILL. Ah!

SNIGGERS. I don't like this place.

BILL. Why not?

SNIGGERS. I don't like the looks of it.

BILL. He's keeping us here because here those niggers can't find us. The three heathen priests what was looking for us so. But we want to go and sell our rubies soon.

ALBERT. There's no ~~sense~~ in it.

BILL. Why not, Albert?

ALBERT. Because I gave those black devils the slip in Hull.

BILL. You gave 'em the slip, Albert?

ALBERT. The slip, all three of them. The fellows with the gold spots on their foreheads. I had the rubies then and I gave them the slip in Hull.

BILL. How did you do it, Albert?

ALBERT. I had the ruby and they were following me . . .

BILL. Who told them you had the rubies? You didn't show it.

ALBERT. No. . . . But they kind of knew.

SNIGGERS. They kind of knew, Albert?

ALBERT. Yes, they know if you've got it. Well, they sort of mouched after me, and I tells a policeman and he says, O, they are only three poor niggers and they wouldn't hurt me. Ugh! When I thought of what they did in Malta to poor old Jim.

BILL. Yes, and to George in Bombay before we started.

SNIGGERS. Ugh!

BILL. Why didn't you give 'em in charge?

ALBERT. What about the rubies, Bill?

BILL. Ah!

ALBERT. Well, I did better than that. I walks up and down through Hull. I walks slow enough. And then I turns a corner and I runs. I never sees a corner but I turns it. But sometimes I let a corner pass just to fool them. I twists about like a hare. Then I sits down and waits. No priests.

SNIGGERS. What?

ALBERT. No heathen black devils with gold spots on their face. I give 'em the slip.

BILL. Well done, Albert!

SNIGGERS. [*after a sigh of content.*] Why didn't you tell us?

ALBERT. 'Cause 'e won't let you speak. 'E's got 'is plans and 'e thinks we're silly folk. Things must be done 'is way. And all the time I've give 'em the slip. Might 'ave 'ad one o' them crooked knives in him before now but for me who give 'em the slip in Hull.

BILL. Well done, Albert! Do you hear that, Toffy? Albert has give 'em the slip.

TOFF. Yes, I hear.

SNIGGERS. Well, what do you say to that?

TOFF. Oh! . . . Well done, Albert!

ALBERT. And what a' you going to do?

TOFF. Going to wait.

ALBERT. Don't seem to know what 'e's waiting for.

SNIGGERS. It's a nasty place.

ALBERT. It's getting silly, Bill. Our money's gone and we want to sell the rubies. Let's get on to a town.

BILL. But 'e won't come.

ALBERT. Then we'll leave him.

SNIGGERS. We'll be all right if we keep away from Hull.

ALBERT. We'll go to London.

BILL. But 'e must 've 'is share.

SNIGGERS. All right. Only let's go. [*To TOFF*]. We're going, do you hear? Give us the rubies.

TOFF. Certainly. *He gives them the rubies from his waistcoat pocket; they are the size of small hen's egg. He goes on reading his paper.*

ALBERT. Come on, Sniggers.

BILL. Good-bye, old man. We'll give you your fair share, but there's nothing to do here—no girls, no halls, and we must sell the rubies.

TOFF. I'm not a fool, Bill.

BILL. No, no, of course not. Of course you ain't, and you've helped us a lot. Good-bye. You'll say good-bye?

TOFF. Oh, yes. Good-bye. [*Still reads his paper.*



TOFF. So I supposed.

ALBERT. You *supposed*!

TOFF. Yes, I believe there's no announcement in the Society papers. But I took this country seat especially to receive them. There's plenty of room if you dig, it is pleasantly situated, and, what is more important, it has a very quiet neighbourhood. So I am at home to them this afternoon.

BILL. Well, you're a deep one.

TOFF. And remember, you've only my wits between you and death, and don't put your futile plans against those of an educated gentleman.

ALBERT. If you're a gentleman, why don't you go about among gentleman instead of the likes of us?

TOFF. Because I was too clever for them as I am too clever for you.

ALBERT. Too clever for them?

TOFF. I never lost a game of cards in my life.

BILL. You never lost a game?

TOFF. Not when there was money in it.

BILL. Well, well.

TOFF. Have a game of poker?

ALL. No, thanks.

TOFF. Then do as you're told.

BILL. All right, Toffy.

SNIGGERS. I saw something just now. Hadn't we better draw the curtains?

TOFF. No.

SNIGGERS. What?

TOFF. Don't draw the curtains.

SNIGGERS. Oh, all right.

BILL. But, Toffy, they can see us. One doesn't let the enemy do that. I don't see why. . .

TOFF. No, of course, you don't.

BILL. Oh, all right, Toffy.

*(All begin to pull out revolvers.*

TOFF. *(putting his own away)*. No revolvers, please.

ALBERT. Why not?

TOFF. Because I don't want any noise at my party. We might get guests that hadn't been invited. Knives are a different matter.

*[All draw knives. TOFF signs to them not to draw them yet. TOFFY has already taken back the rubies.]*

BILL. I think they're coming, Toffy.

TOFF. Not yet.

ALBERT. When will they come?

TOFF. When I am quite ready to receive them. Not before.

SNIGGERS. I should like to get this over.

TOFF. Should you? Then we'll have them now.

SNIGGERS. Now?

TOFF. Yes. Listen to me. You shall do as you see me do. You will all pretend to go out. I'll show you how. I've got the rubies. When they see me alone they will come for their idol's eye.

BILL. How can they tell like this which of us has it?

TOFF. I confess I don't know, but they seem to.

SNIGGERS. What will you do when they come in?

TOFF. I shall do nothing.

SNIGGERS. What?

TOFF. They will creep up behind me. Then, my friends, Sniggers and Bill and Albert, who gave them the slip, will do what they can.

BILL. All right, Toffy. Trust us.

TOFF. If you're a little slow, you will see enacted the cheerful spectacle that accompanied the demise of Jim.

SNIGGERS. Don't, Toffy. We'll be there all right.

TOFF. Very well. Now watch me. [*He went past the windows to the inner door. He opened it inwards, then, under cover of the open door, he slipped down on his knees and closed it, remaining on the inside, appearing to have gone out. He signed to the others, who understood. Then he appeared to re-enter in the same manner.*]

TOFF. Now, I shall sit with my back to the door. You go out one by one, so far as our friends can make out. Crouch very low to be on the safe side. They mustn't see you through the window. [*BILL made his sham exit.*]

TOFF. Remember, no revolvers. The police are, I believe, proverbially inquisitive.

[*The other two followed BILL. All three were now crouching inside the door. TOFF put the rubies beside him on the table. He lighted a cigarette. The door at the back opened so slowly that you could hardly say at what moment it began. TOFF picked up his paper. A native of India wriggled along the floor ever so slowly, seeking cover from chairs. He moved where TOFF was. SNIFFERS and ALBERT leaned forward. BILL'S arm kept them back. An arm chair had better conceal them from the Indian. The black PRIEST neared TOFF. BILL watched to see if any more were coming. Then he leapt forward alone—he had taken his boots off—and knifed the PRIEST. The PRIEST tried to shout, but BILL'S left hand was over his mouth. TOFF continued to read his sporting paper. He never looked around.*]

BILL. There's only one, Toffy. What shall we do?

TOFF [*without turning his head*]. Only one?

BILL. Yes.

BOFF. Wait a moment? Let me think. [*Still apparently*

*absorbed in his paper*] Ah, yes. You go back, Bill. We must attract another guest . . . Now, are you ready?

BILL. Yes.

TOFF. All right. You shall now see my demise at my Yorkshire residence. You must receive guests for me. [*He leapt up in full view of the window, flung up both arms and fell to the floor near the dead PRIEST.*] Now, be ready. [*His eyes closed. There was a long pause. Again the door opened, very, very slowly. Another PRIEST crept in. He had three golden spots upon his forehead. He looked round, then he crept up to his companion and turned him over and looked inside of his clenched hands. Then he looked at the recumbent TOFF. Then he crept towards him. BILL slipped after him and knifed him like the other with his left hand over his mouth.*]

BILL. We've only got two, Toffy.

TOFF. Still another.

BILL. What'll we do?

TOFF [*sitting up*]. Hum.

BILL. This is the best way, much.

TOFF. Out of the question. Never play the same game twice.

BILL. Why not, Toffy?

TOFF. Doesn't work if you do.

BILL. Well?

TOFF. I have it, Albert. You will now walk into the room. I showed you how to do it.

ALBERT. Yes.

TOFF. Just run over here and have a fight at this window with these two men.

ALBERT. But they're . . .

TOFF. Yes, they're dead, my perspicuous Albert. But Bill and I are going to resuscitate them. . . . Come on. [*BILL picked up a body under the arms.*]



TOFF. That's right, Bill. Come and help us, Sniggers. . . Keep low, keep low. Wave their arms about, Sniggers. Don't show yourself. Now, Albert, over you go. Our Albert is slain. Back you get, Bill. Back, Sniggers. Still, Albert. Mustn't move when he comes. Not a muscle.

*[A face appeared at the window and stayed for a time. Then the door opened and, looking craftily round, the third PRIEST entered. He looked at his companions' bodies and turned round. He suspected something. He took up one of the knives and with a knife in each hand he put his back to the wall. He looked to the left and right.]*

TOFF. Come on, Bill. *(The PRIEST rushed to the door. TOFF knifed the last PRIEST from behind.)*

TOFF. A good day's work, my friends.

BILL. Well done, Toffy. Oh, you are deep one!

ALBERT. A deep one if ever there was one.

SNIGGERS. There ain't any more, Bill, are there?

TOFF. No more in the world, my friend.

BILL. Aye, that's all there are. There were only three in the temple. Three priests and their beastly idol.

ALBERT. What are they worth, Toffy? Are they worth a thousand pounds?

TOFF. They are worth all they've got in the shop. Worth just whatever we like to ask for it.

ALBERT. Then we're millionaires now.

TOFF. Yes, and, what is more important, we no longer have any heirs.

BILL. We'll have to sell them now.

ALBERT. That won't be easy. It's a pity they aren't small, and we had half a dozen. Hadn't the idol any other on him?

BILL. No, he was green jade all over and only had these

two eyes. He was a long sight uglier than anything else in the world.

SNIGGERS. I'm sure we ought all to be very grateful to Toffy.

BILL. And, indeed, we ought.

ALBERT. If it hadn't been for him. . . .

BILL. Yes, if it hadn't been for old Toffy . . .

SNIGGERS. He's a deep one.

TOFF. Well, you see I just have a knack of foreseeing things.

SNIGGERS. I should think you did.

BILL. Why, I don't suppose anything happens that our Toff doesn't foresee. Does it, Toffy?

SNIGGERS. Well, I don't think it does, Bill. I don't think it often does.

BILL. Life is no more than just a game of cards to our old Toff.

TOFF. Well, we've taken these fellow's tricks.

SNIGGERS [*going to the window*]. It wouldn't do for anyone to see them.

TOFF. Oh, nobody will come this way. We're all alone on a moor.

BILL. Where will we put them?

TOFF. Bury them in the cellar, but there's no hurry.

BILL. And what then, Toffy?

TOFF. Why, then we'll go to London and upset the ruby business. We have really come through this job very nicely.

BILL. I think the first thing that we ought to do is to give a little supper to old Toffy. We'll bury these fellows to-night.

ALBERT. Yes, let's.

SNIGGERS. The very thing!

BILL. And we'll all drink his health.

ALBERT. Good old Toffy!

SNIGGERS. He ought to have been a general or a premier.  
[*They got bottles from cupboard, etc.*]

TOFF. Well, we've earned our bit of a supper. [*They sat down.*]

BILL [*glass in hand*]. Here's to old Toffy, who guessed everything!

ALBERT and SNIGGERS. Good old Toffy!

BILL. Toffy, who saved our lives and made our fortunes.

ALBERT and SNIGGERS. Hear! Hear!

TOFF. And here's to Bill, who saved me twice to-night.

BILL. Couldn't have done it but for your cleverness, Toffy.

SNIGGERS. Hear, hear! Hear, hear!

ALBERT. He foresees everything.

BILL. A speech, Toffy. A speech from our general.

ALL. Yes, a speech.

SNIGGERS. A speech.

TOFF. Well, get me some water. This whisky's too much for my head, and I must keep it clear till our friends are safe in the cellar.

BILL. Water? Yes, of course. Get him some water, Sniggers.

SNIGGERS. We don't use water here. Where shall I get it?

BILL. Outside in the garden. [*Exit* SNIGGERS.]

ALBERT. Here's to future!

BILL. Here's to Albert Thomas, Esquire.

ALBERT. And William Jones, Esquire.

Re-enter Sniggers terrified.

TOFF. Hullo, here's Jacob Smith, Esquire, J.P., *alias* Sniggers, back again.

SNIGGERS. Toffy, I've been thinking about my share in that ruby. I don't want it, Toffy; I don't want it.

TOFF. Nonsense, Sniggers. Nonsense.

SNIGGERS. You shall have it, Toffy, you shall have it yourself, only say Sniggers has no share in this 'ere ruby. Say it, Toffy, say it!

BILL. Want to turn informer, Sniggers?

SNIGGERS. No, no. Only I don't want the ruby, Toffy . . .

TOFF. No more nonsense, Sniggers. We're all in together in this. If one hangs, we all hang; but they won't outwit me. Besides, it's not a hanging affair, they had their knives.

SNIGGERS. Toffy, Toffy, I always treated you fair, Toffy. I was always one to say, "Give Toffy a chance." Take back my share, Toffy.

TOFF. What's the matter. What are you driving at?

SNIGGERS. Take it back, Toffy.

TOFF. Answer me, what are you up to?

SNIGGERS. I don't want my share any more.

BILL. Have you seen the police? [Albert pulled out his knife.

TOFF. No, no knives, Albert.

ALBERT. What then?

TOFF. The honest truth in open court, barring the rubies. We were attacked.

SNIGGERS. There's no police.

TOFF. Out with it.

SNIGGERS. I swear to God . . .

ALBERT. Well?

TOFF. Don't interrupt.

SNIGGERS. I swear I saw something *what I didn't like*.

TOFF. What you didn't like?

SNIGGERS [in ears]. Oh, Toffy, Toffy, take it back. Take my share. Say you take it.

THE TOFF. What has he seen?

[Dead silence, only broken by SNIGGERS' sobs. Then steps were heard. Entered a hideous idol. It was blind and groped its way. It groped its way to the ruby and picked it up and screwed it into the sockets in the forehead. SNIGGERS still wept softly, the rest stared in

*horror. The idol stepped out, not groping. Its steps moved off, then stopped.*

TOFF. O, great heavens!

ALBERT [*in a childish, plaintive voice*]. What is it, Toffy?

BILL. Albert, it is that obscene idol [*in a whisper*] come from India.

ALBERT. It is gone.

BILL. It has taken its eyes.

SNIGGERS. We are saved.

A VOICE OFF [*with outlandish accent*]. Meestaire William Jones, Able Soldier.

(TOFF *had never spoken, never moved. He only gazed stupidly in horror.*

BILL. Albert, Albert, what is this? [*He rose and walked out. One moan was heard. SNIGGERS went to the window. He fell back sickly.*

ALBERT [*in a whisper*]. What has happened?

SNIGGERS. I have seen it. I have seen it. Oh, I have seen it! [*He returned to table.*

TOFF [*laying his hand very gently on SNIGGERS' arm, speaking softly and winningly*]. What was it, Sniggers?

SNIGGERS. I have seen it.

ALBERT. What?

SNIGGERS. Oh!

VOICE. Meestaire Albert Thomas, Able Soldier.

ALBERT. Must I go, Toffy? Toffy, must I go?

SNIGGERS [*clutching him*]. Don't move.

ALBERT [*going*]. Toffy, Toffy.

VOICE. Meestaire Jacob Smith, Able Soldier.

SNIGGERS. I can't go, Toffy, I can't go. I can't do it.

VOICE. Meestaire Toff, Able Badmash. [*He goes.*

THE TOFF. I did not see it.

And all the four saw the idol vanishing before their eyes, along with their dreams of wealth.

(Adapted from Lod Dunsaney's 'A Night at An Inn'.)

# MARK TWAIN IN INDIA

This is just the book for all the thousands of Americans and British nationals who are now in India. Over 50 years ago, Mark Twain, the great American humourist and writer, visited India, and this little book, containing a colourful and racy account of his trip, will serve as an excellent first introduction of this ancient land to the mind and heart of our British and American friends.

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**RUPEE ONE and ANNAS FOUR**

## A WITCH'S DEN

Our kind host Sham Rao was very gay during the remaining hours of our visit. He did his best to entertain us, and would not hear of our leaving the neighbourhood without having seen its greatest celebrity, its most interesting sight. A *jadu wali*—sorceress—well known in the district, was just at this time under the influence of seven sister-goddesses, who took possession of her by turns, and spoke their oracles through her lips. Sham Rao said we must not fail to see her, be it only in the interests of science.

The evening closes in, and we once more get ready for an excursion. It is only five miles to the cavern of the Pythia of Hindustan; the road runs through a jungle, but it is level and smooth. Besides, the jungle and its ferocious inhabitants have ceased to frighten us. The timid elephants we had in the "dead city" are sent home, and we are to mount new behemoths belonging to a neighbouring Raja. The pair, that stand before the verandah like two dark hillocks, are steady and trustworthy. Many a time these two have hunted the royal tiger, and no wild shrieking or thunderous roaring can frighten them. And so, let us start! The ruddy flames of the torches dazzle our eyes and increase the forest gloom. Our surroundings seem so dark, so mysterious. There is something indescribably fascinating, almost solemn, in these night-journeys in the out-of-the-way corners of India. Everything is silent and deserted around you, everything is dozing on the earth and overhead. Only the heavy, regular tread of the elephants breaks the stillness of the night, like the sound of falling hammers in the underground smithy of Vulcan. From time to time uncanny voices and murmurs are heard in the black forest.

"The wind sings its strange song amongst the ruins," says one of us, "what a wonderful acoustic phenomenon!"

"Bhuta, bhuta!" whisper the awestruck torch-bearers. They brandish their torches and swiftly spin on one leg, and snap their fingers to chase away the aggressive spirits.

The plaintive murmur is lost in the distance. The forest is once more filled with the cadences of its invisible nocturnal life—the metallic whirr of the crickets, the feeble, monotonous croak of the tree-frog, the rustle of the leaves. From time to time all this suddenly stops short and then begins again, gradually increasing and increasing.

Heavens! What teeming life, what stores of vital energy are hidden under the smallest leaf, the most imperceptible blades of grass, in this tropical forest! Myriads of stars shine in the dark blue of the sky, and myriads of fireflies twinkle at us from every bush, moving sparks, like a pale reflection of the far-away stars.

We left the thick forest behind us, and reached a deep glen, on three sides bordered with the thick forest, where even by day the shadows are as dark as by night. We were about two thousand feet above the foot of the Vindhya ridge, judging by the ruined wall of Mandu, straight above our heads.

Suddenly a very chilly wind rose that nearly blew our torches out. Caught in the labyrinth of bushes and rocks, the wind angrily shook the branches of the blossoming syringas, then, shaking itself free, it turned back along the glen and flew down the valley, howling, whistling and shrieking, as if all the fiends of the forest together were joining in a funeral song.

"Here we are," said Sham Rao, dismounting. "Here is the village; the elephants cannot go any further."

"The village? Surely you are mistaken. I don't see anything but trees."

"It is too dark to see the village. Besides, the huts are so small, and so hidden by the bushes, that even by daytime



you could hardly find them. And there is no light in the houses, for fear of the spirits."

"And where is your witch? Do you mean we are to watch her performance in complete darkness?"

Sham Rao cast a furtive, tumid look round him; and his voice, when he answered our questions, was somewhat tremulous.

"I implore you not to call her a witch! She may hear you. . . . It is not far off, it is not more than half a mile. Do not allow this short distance to shake your decision. No elephant, and even no horse, could make its way there. We must walk. . . . But we shall find plenty of light there. . . ."

This was unexpected, and far from agreeable. To walk in this gloomy Indian night; to scramble through thickets of cactuses; to venture in a dark forest, full of wild animals—this was too much for Miss X—. She declared that she would go no further. She would wait for us in the howdah, on the elephant's back, and perhaps would go to sleep.

Narayan was against this *parti de plaisir* from the very beginning, and now, without explaining his reasons, he said she was the only sensible one among us.

"You won't lose anything," he remarked, "by staying where you are. And I only wish everyone would follow your example."

"What ground have you for saying so, I wonder?" remonstrated Sham Rao, and a slight note of disappointment rang in his voice, when he saw that the excursion proposed and organized by himself, threatened to come to nothing. "What harm could be done by it? I won't insist any more that the 'incarnation of god's is a rare sight, and that the Europeans hardly ever have an opportunity of witnessing it; but, besides, the Kungalim in question is no ordinary woman. She leads a holy life; she is a prophetess, and her

blessing could not prove harmful to any one. I insisted on this excursion out of pure patriotism."

"Sahib, if your patriotism consists in displaying before foreigners the worst of our plagues, then why did you not order all the leper of your district to assemble and parade before the eyes of our guests? You are a *patel*, you have the power to do it."

How bitterly Narayan's voice sounded to our unaccustomed ears! Usually he was so even-tempered, so indifferent to everything belonging to the exterior world.

Fearing a quarrel between the Hindus, the colonel remarked, in a conciliatory tone, that it was too late for us to reconsider our expedition. Besides, without being a believer in the "incarnation of gods," he was personally firmly convinced that demoniacs existed even in the West. He was eager to study every psychological phenomenon, wherever he met with it, and whatever shape it might assume.

It would have been a striking sight for our European and American friends if they had beheld our procession on that dark night. Our way lay along a narrow winding path up the mountain. Not more than two people could walk together—and we were thirty, including the torch-bearers. Surely some reminiscence of night sallies against the confederate Southerners had revived in the colonel's breast, judging by the readiness with which he took upon himself the leadership of our small expedition. He ordered all the rifles and revolvers to be loaded, despatched three torch-bearers much ahead of us, and arranged us in pairs. Under such a skilled chieftain we had nothing to fear from tigers; and so our procession started, and slowly crawled up the winding path.

A new glen opened before us, the entrance of which, from the valley, was well masked by thick trees. We understood

how easily we might have wandered round it, without ever suspecting its existence. At the bottom of the glen we discovered the abode of the celebrated Kangalim.

The den, as it turned out, was situated in the ruin of an old Hindu temple in tolerably good preservation.

But the central portion, built of red granite, stood unharmed by time and, as we learned afterwards, a deep tunnel opened just behind its closely-shut door. What was beyond it no one knew. Sham Rao assured us that no man of the last three generations had ever stepped over the threshold of this iron door; no one had seen the subterranean passage for many years. Kangalim lived there in perfect isolation, and, according to the oldest people in the neighbourhood she had always lived there. Some people said she was three hundred years old; others alleged that a certain old man on his death-bed revealed to his son that this old woman was no one else than *his own uncle*.

We had come too early, and the Pythia did not at first appear. But the square before the temple was full of people, and a wild, though picturesque, scene it was. An enormous bonfire blazed in the centre, and round it crowded the naked savages like so many black gnomes, adding whole branches of trees sacred to the seven sister-goddesses. Slowly and evenly they all jumped from one leg to another to the tune of a single monotonous musical phrase, which they repeated in chorus, accompanied by several local drums and tambourines. The hushed trill of the latter mingled with the forest echoes and the hysterical moans of two little girls, who lay under a heap of leaves by the fire. The poor children were brought here by their mothers, in the hope that the goddesses would take pity upon them and banish the two evil spirits under whose obsession they were. Both mothers were quite young, and sat on their heels blankly and sadly staring at the flames. No one paid us the sligh-

test attention when we appeared, and afterwards during all our stay these people acted as if we were invisible. Had we worn a cap of darkness they could not have behaved more strangely.

"They feel the approach of the gods! The atmosphere is full of their sacred emanations!" mysteriously explained Sham Rao, contemplating with reverence the natives, whom his beloved Haeckel might easily have mistaken for his "missing link," the brood of his "*Bathybius Haeckelii*."

"They are simply under the influence of toddy and opium!" retorted the irreverent Babu.

The lookers-on moved as in a dream, as if they all were only half-awakened somnambulists; but the actors were simply victims of St. Vitus's dance. One of them, a tall old man, a mere skeleton with a long white beard, left the ring and began whirling vertiginously, with his arms spread like wings, and loudly grinding his long, wolf-like teeth. He was painful and disgusting to look at. He soon fell down, and was carelessly, almost mechanically, pushed aside by the feet of the others still engaged in their demoniac performance.

All this was frightful enough, but many more horrors were in store for us.

Waiting for the appearance of the *prima donna* of this forest opera company, we sat down on the trunk of a fallen tree, ready to ask innumerable questions of our condescending host. But I was hardly seated, when a feeling of of indescribable astonishment and horror made me shrink back.

I beheld the skull of a monstrous animal, the like of which I could not find in my zoological reminiscences.

This head was much larger than the head of an elephant skeleton. And still it could not be anything but an elephant, judging by the skilfully restored trunk, which wound down

to my feet like a gigantic black leech. But an elephant has no horns, whereas this one had four of them! The front pair stuck from the flat forehead slightly bending forward and then spreading out; and the others had a wide base, like the root of a deer's horn, that gradually decreased almost up to the middle, and bore long branches enough to decorate a dozen ordinary elks. Pieces of the transparent amber-yellow rhinoceros skin were strained over the empty eye-holes of the skull, and small lamps burning behind them only added to the horror, the devilish appearance of this head.

"What can this be?" was our unanimous question. None of us had ever met anything like it, and even the colonel looked aghast.

"It is a Sivatherium," said Narayan. "Is it possible you never came across these fossils in European museums? Their remains are common enough in the Himalayas, though, of course, in fragments. They were called after Shiva."

"If the collector of this district ever hears that this antediluvian relic adorns the den of your—ahem!—witch," remarked the Babu, "it won't adorn it many days longer."

All round the skull, and on the floor of the portico there were heaps of white flowers, which, though not quite antediluvian, were totally unknown to us. They were as large as a big rose; and their white petals were covered with a red powder, the inevitable concomitant of every Indian religious ceremony. Further on, there were groups of coco-nuts, and large brass dishes filled with rice; and each adorned with a red or green taper. In the centre of the portico there stood a queer-shaped censer, surrounded with chandeliers. A little boy, dressed from head to foot in white, threw into it handfuls of aromatic powders.

"These people, who assemble here to worship Kangalim," said Sham Rao, "do not actually belong either to her sect or to any other. They are devil-worshippers. They do not believe in Hindu gods, but live in small communities; they belong to one of the many Indian races, which usually are called the hill-tribes. Unlike the Shanars of Southern Travancore, they do not use the blood of sacrificial animals; they do not build separate temples to their bhutas. But they are possessed by the strange fancy that the goddess Kali, the wife of Shiva, from time immemorial has had a grudge against them. Save this little difference, they have the same beliefs as the Shanars. God does not exist for them; and even Shiva is considered by them as an ordinary spirit. Their chief worship is offered to the souls of the dead. These souls, however righteous and kind they may be in their lifetime, become after death as wicked as can be; they are happy only when they are torturing living men and cattle. As the opportunities of doing so are the only reward for the virtues they possessed when incarnated, a very wicked man is punished by becoming after his death a very soft-hearted ghost; he loathes his loss of daring, and is altogether miserable. The results of this strange logic are not bad, nevertheless. These savages and devil-worshippers are the kindest and the most truth-loving of all the hill-tribes. They do whatever they can to be worthy of their ultimate reward; because, don't you see, they all long to become the wickedest of devils! . . ."

And put in good humour by his own wittiness, Sham Rao laughed till his hilarity became offensive, considering the sacredness of the place.

"A year ago some business matters sent me to Tinevelli," continued he. "Saying with a friend of mine, who is a Shanar, I was allowed to be present at one of the ceremonies in the honour of devils. No European has as yet

witnessed this worship—whatever the missionaries may say; but there are many converts amongst the Shanars, who willingly describe them to the *padres*. My friend is a wealthy man, which is probably the reason why the devils are especially vicious to him. They poison his cattle, spoil his crops and his coffee plants, and persecute his numerous relations, sending them sunstrokes, madness and epilepsy, over which illnesses they especially preside. These wicked demons have settled in every corner of his spacious landed property—in the woods, the ruins, and even in his stables. To avert all this, my friend covered his land with stucco pyramids, and prayed humbly, asking the demons to draw their portraits on each of them separately, as the rightful owner of this, or that, particular pyramid. And what do you think? . . . Next morning all the pyramids were found covered with drawings. Each of them bore an incredibly good likeness of the dead of the neighbourhood. My friend had known personally almost all of them. He found also a portrait of his own late father amongst the lot. . . .”

“Well? And was he satisfied?”

“Oh, he was very glad, very satisfied. It enabled him to choose the right thing to gratify the personal tastes of each demon, don't you see? He was not vexed at finding his father's portrait. His father was somewhat irascible; once he nearly broke both his son's legs, administering to him fatherly punishment with an iron bar, so that he could not possibly be very dangerous after his death. But another portrait, found on the best and the prettiest of the pyramids, amazed my friend a good deal, and put him in a blue funk. The whole district recognized an English officer, a certain Captain Pole, who in his lifetime was as kind a gentleman as ever lived.”

“Indeed? But do you mean to say that this strange people worshipped Captain Pole also?”

"Of course they did! Captain Pole was such a worthy man, such an honest officer, that, after his death, he could not help being promoted to the highest rank of Shanar devils. The Pe-Kovil, demon's house, sacred to his memory, stands side by side with the Pe-Kovil Bhadrakali, which was recently conferred on the wife of a certain German missionary, who also was a most charitable lady and so is very dangerous now."

"But what are their ceremonies? Tell us something about their rites."

"Their rites consist chiefly of dancing, singing, and killing sacrificial animals. The Shanars have no castes, and eat all kinds of meat. The crowd assembles about the Pe-Kovil, previously designated by the priest; there is a general beating of drums, and slaughtering of fowls, sheep and goats. When Captain Pole's turn came an ox was killed, as a thoughtful attention to the peculiar tastes of his nation. The priest appeared, covered with bangles, and holding a wand on which tinkled numberless little bells, and wearing garlands of red and white flowers round his neck, and a black mantle, on which were embroidered the ugliest fiends you can imagine. Horns were blown and drums rolled incessantly. And oh, I forgot to tell you there was also a kind of fiddle, the secret of which is known only to the Shanar priesthood. Its bow is ordinary enough, made of bamboo; but it is whispered that the strings are human veins. . . . When Captain Pole took possession of the priest's body, the priest leapt high in the air, and then rushed on the ox and killed him. He drank off the hot blood, and then began his dance. But what a fright he was when dancing! You know, I am not superstitious. . . . Am I? . . ."

Sham Rao looked at us inquiringly; and I, for one, was glad, at that moment, that Miss X——was half a mile off, asleep in the howdah.



"He turned, and turned, as if possessed by all the demons of Naraka. The enraged crowd hooted and howled when the priest began to inflict deep wounds all over his body with the bloody sacrificial knife. To see him, with his hair waving in the wind and his mouth covered with foam; to see him bathing in the blood of the sacrificed animal, mixing it with his own, was more than I could bear. I felt as if hallucinated, I fancied I also was spinning round. . . ."

Sham Rao stopped abruptly, struck dumb. Kanganlim stood before us!

Her appearance was so unexpected that we all felt embarrassed. Carried away by Sham Rao's description, we had noticed neither how nor whence she came. Had she appeared from beneath the earth we could not have been more astonished. Narayan stared at her, opening wide his big jet-black eyes; the Babu clicked his tongue in utter confusion.

Imagine a skeleton seven feet high, covered with brown leather, with a dead child's tiny head stuck on its bony shoulders; the eyes set so deep and at the same time flashing such fiendish flames all through your body that you begin to feel your brain stop working, your thoughts become en-angled and your blood freeze in your veins.

I describe my personal impressions, and no words of mine can do them justice. My description is too weak. Mr. Y—and the colonel both grew pale under her stare, and Mr. Y—made a movement as if about to rise.

Needless to say that such an impression could not last. As soon as the witch had turned her gleaming eyes to the kneeling crowd, it vanished as swiftly as it had come. But still all our attention was fixed on this remarkable creature.

Three hundred years old! Who can tell? Judging by her appearance, we might as well conjecture her to be a thousand. We beheld a genuine living mummy, or rather a mummy endowed with motion. She seemed to have been withering since the creation. Neither time, nor the ills of life, nor the elements could ever affect this living statue of death. The all-destroying hand of time had touched her and stopped short. Time could do no more, and so had left her. And with all this, not a single grey hair. Her long black locks shone with a greenish sheen, and fell in heavy masses down to her knees.

To my great shame, I must confess that a disgusting reminiscence flashed into my memory. I thought about the hair and the nails of corpses growing in the graves, and tried to examine the nails of the old woman.

Meanwhile, she stood motionless as if suddenly transformed into an ugly idol. In one hand she held a dish with a piece of burning camphor, in the other a handful of rice, and she never removed her burning eyes from the crowd. The pale yellow flame of the camphor flickered in the wind, and lit up her death-like head, almost touching her chin; but she paid no heed to it. Her neck, as wrinkled as a mushroom, as thin as a stick, was surrounded by three rows of golden medallions. Her head was adorned with a golden snake. Her grotesque, hardly human body was covered by a piece of saffron-yellow muslin.

The demoniac little girls raised their heads from beneath the leaves, and set up a prolonged animal-like howl. Their example was followed by the old man, who lay exhausted by his frantic dance.

The witch tossed her head convulsively, and began her invocations, rising on tiptoe, as if moved by some external force.

“The goddess, one of the seven sisters, begins to take

possession of her," whispered Sham Rao, not even thinking of wiping away the big drops of sweat that streamed from his brow. "Look, look at her!"

This advice was quite superfluous. We *were* looking at her, and at nothing else.

At first, the movements of the witch were slow, unequal, somewhat convulsive; then, gradually, they became less angular; at last, as if catching the cadence of the drums, leaning all her long body forward, and writhing like an eel, she rushed round and round the blazing bonfire. A dry leaf caught in a hurricane could not fly swifter. Her bare bony feet trod noiselessly on the rocky ground. The long locks of her hair flew round her like snakes, lashing the spectators, who knelt, stretching their trembling arms towards her, and writhing as if they were alive. Whoever was touched by one of this Fury's black curls, fell down on the ground, overcome with happiness, shouting thanks to the goddess, and considering himself blessed for ever. It was not human hair that touched the happy elect, it was the goddess herself, one of the seven.

Swifter and swifter fly her decrepit legs; the young, vigorous hands of the drummer can hardly follow her. But she does not think of catching the measure of his music; she rushes, she flies forward. Staring with her expressionless, motionless orbs at something before her, at something that is not visible to our mortal eyes, she hardly glances at her worshippers; then her look becomes full of fire, and whoever she looks at feels burned through to the marrow of his bones. At every glance she throws a few grains of rice. The small handful seems inexhaustible, as if the wrinkled palm contained the bootomless bag of Prince Fortunatus.

Suddenly she stops as if thunderstruck.

The mad race round the bonfire had lasted twelve minutes, but we looked in vain for a trace of fatigue on the death-

like face of the witch. She stopped only for a moment, just the necessary time for the goddess to release her. As soon as she felt free, by a single effort she jumped over the fire and plunged into the deep tank by the portico. This time, she plunged only once; and whilst she stayed under the water, the second sister-goddess entered her body. The little boy in white produced another dish, with a new piece of burning camphor, just in time for the witch to take it up, and to rush again on her headlong way.

The colonel sat with his watch in his hand. During the second obsession the witch ran, leaped, and raced for exactly fourteen minutes. After this, she plunged twice in the tank, in honour of the second sister; and with every new obsession the number of her plunges increased, till it became six.

It was already an hour and a half since the race began. All this time the witch never rested, stopping only for a few seconds, to disappear under the water.

"She is a fiend, she cannot be a woman!" exclaimed the colonel, seeing the head of the witch immersed for the sixth time in the water.

"Hang me if I know!" grumbled Mr. Y——, nervously pulling his beard. "The only thing I know is that a grain of her cursed rice entered my throat, and I can't get it out!"

"Hush, hush! Please, do be quiet!" implored Sham Rao. "By talking you will spoil the whole business!"

I glanced at Narayan and lost myself in conjectures.

His features, which usually were so calm and serene, were quite altered at this moment, by a deep shadow of suffering. His lips trembled, and the pupils of his eyes were dilated, as if by a dose of *belladonna*. His eyes were lifted over the heads of the crowd, as if in his disgust he tried not to see what was before him, and at the same time could not see it, engaged in a deep reverie, which carried him away from us, and from the whole performance.

"What is the matter with him?" was my thought, but I had no time to ask him, because the witch was again in full swing, chasing her own shadow.

But with the seventh goddess the programme was slightly changed. The running of the old woman changed to leaping. Sometimes bending down to the ground, like a black panther, she leaped up to some worshipper, and halting before him touched his forehead with her finger, while her long, thin body shook with inaudible laughter. Then, again, as if shrinking back playfully from her shadow, and chased by it, in some uncanny game, the witch appeared to us like a horrid caricature of Dinorah, dancing her mad dance. Suddenly she straightened herself to her full height, darted to the portico and crouched before the smoking censer, beating her forehead against the granite steps. Another jump, and she was quite close to us, before the head of the monstrous Sivatherium. She knelt down again and bowed her head to the ground several times, with the sound of an empty barrel knocked against something hard.

We had hardly the time to spring to our feet and shrink back when she appeared on the top of the Sivatherium's head, standing there amongst the horns.

Narayan alone did not stir, and fearlessly looked straight in the eyes of the frightful sorceress.

But what was this? Who spoke in those deep manly tones? Her lips were moving from her breast, were issuing those quick, abrupt phrases, but the voice sounded hollow as if coming from beneath the ground.

"Hush, hush!" whispered Sham Rao, his whole body trembling. "She is going to prophesy! . . ."

"She?" incredulously inquired Mr. Y—. "This a woman's voice? I don't believe it for a moment. Someone's uncle must be stowed away somewhere about the place. Not the fabulous uncle she inherited from, but a real live one! . . ."

Sham Rao winced under the irony of this supposition, and cast an imploring look at the speaker.

"Woe to you! woe to you!" echoed the voice. "Woe to you, children of the impure Java and Vijaya! of the mocking, unbelieving lingerers round great Shiva's door! Ye, who are cursed by eighty thousand sages! Woe to you who believe not in the goddess Kali, and you who deny us, her Seven divine Sisters! Flesh-eating, yellow-legged vultures! friends of the oppressors of our land! dogs who are not ashamed to eat from the same trough with the Bellati!" (foreigners).

"It seems to me that your prophetess only foretells the past," said Mr. Y——, philosophically putting his hands in his pockets. "I should say that she is hinting at you, my dear Sham Rao."

"Yes! and at us also," murmured the colonel, who was evidently beginning to feel uneasy.

As to the unlucky Sham Rao, he broke out in a cold sweat, and tried to assure us that we were mistaken, that we did not fully understand her language.

"It is not about you, it is not about you! It is of me she speaks, because I am in Government service. Oh, she is inexorable!"

"Rakshasas! Asuras!" thundered the voice. "How dare you appear before us? how dare you to stand on this holy ground in boots made of a cow's sacred skin? Be cursed for etern——"

But her curse was not destined to be finished. In an instant the Hercules-like Narayan had fallen on the Sivatherium, and upset the whole pile, the skull, the horns and the demoniac Pythia included. A second more, and we thought we saw the witch flying in the air towards the portico. A confused vision of a stout, shaven Brahman, suddenly emerging from under the Sivatherium and instantly

disappearing in the hollow beneath it, flashed before my dilated eyes.

But, alas! after the third second had passed, we all came to the embarrassing conclusion that, judging from the loud clang of the door of the cave, the representative of the Seven Sisters had ignominiously fled. The moment she had disappeared from our inquisitive eyes to her subterranean domain, we all realized that the unearthly hollow voice we had heard had nothing supernatural about it and belonged to the Brahman hidden under the Sivatherium—to someone's live uncle, as Mr. Y—— had rightly supposed.

Oh, Narayan! how carelessly, how disorderly the worlds rotate around us. . . . I begin to seriously doubt their reality. From this moment I shall earnestly believe that all things in the universe are nothing but illusion, a mere Maya. I am becoming a Vedantin. . . . I doubt that in the whole universe there may be found anything more objective than a Hindu witch flying up the spout.

H. P. Blavatsky.

## YANK IN INDIA

and other

Indian Stories of Love and War

by

PROF. B. J. VASWANI

Now Ready

Annas Ten

# AN ISLE OF MYSTERY

When evening began to draw on, we were driving beneath the trees of a wild jungle; arriving soon after at a large lake, we left the carriages. The shores were overgrown with reeds—not the reeds that answer our European notions, but rather such as Gulliver was likely to meet with in his travels to Brobdingnag. The place was perfectly deserted, but we saw a boat fastened close to the land. We had still about an hour and a half of daylight before us, and so we quietly sat down on some ruins and enjoyed the splendid view, whilst the servants of the Thakur transported our bags, boxes and bundles of rugs from the carriages to the ferry boat. Mr. Y—— was preparing to paint the picture before us, which indeed was charming.

“Don’t be in a hurry to take down this view,” said Gulab-Singh. “In half an hour we shall be on the islet, where the view is still lovelier. We may spend there the night and to-morrow morning as well.”

“I am afraid it will be too dark in an hour,” said Mr. Y——, opening his colour box. “And as for to-morrow, we shall probably have to start very early.”

“Oh, no! there is not the slightest need to start early. We may even stay here part of the afternoon. From here to the railway station it is only three hours, and the train only leaves for Jubbulpore at eight in the evening. And do you know,” added the Thakur, smiling in his usual mysterious way, “I am going to treat you to a concert. To-night you shall be witness of a very interesting natural phenomenon connected with this island.”

We all pricked up our ears with curiosity.

“Do you mean that island there? and do you really think we must go?” asked the colonel. “Why should not we spend



the night here, where we are so deliciously cool, and where . . ."

"Where the forest swarms with playful leopards, and the reeds shelter snug family parties of the serpent race, were you going to say, colonel?" interrupted the Babu, with a broad grin. "Don't you admire this merry gathering, for instance? Look at them! There is the father and the mother, uncles, aunts, and children. . . . I am sure I could point out even a mother-in-law."

Miss X——looked in the direction he indicated and shrieked, till all the echoes of the forest groaned in answer. Not farther than three steps from her there were at least forty grown up serpents and baby snakes. They amused themselves by practising somersaults, coiled up, then straightened again and interlaced their tails, presenting to our dilated eyes a picture of perfect innocence and primitive contentment. Miss X——could not stand it any longer and fled to the carriage, whence she showed us a pale, horrified face. The Thakur, who had arranged himself comfortably beside Mr. Y——in order to watch the progress of his painting, left his seat and looked attentively at the dangerous group, quietly smoking his *gargari*—Rajput narghile—the while.

"If you do not stop screaming you will attract all the wild animals of the forest in another ten minutes," said he. "None of you have anything to fear. If you do not excite an animal he is almost sure to leave you alone, and most probably will run away from you."

With these words he lightly waved his pipe in the direction of the serpentine family-party. A thunder-bolt falling in their midst could not have been more effectual. The whole living mass looked stunned for a moment, and then rapidly disappeared among the reeds with loud hissing and rustling.

"Now this is pure mesmerism, I declare," said the colonel, on whom not a gesture of the Thakur was lost. "How did you do it, Gul'ab-Singh? Where did you learn this science?"

"They were simply frightened away by the sudden movement of my chibook, and there was no science and no mesmerism about it. Probably by this fashionable modern word you mean what we Hindus call *vashikarana vidya*—that is to say, the science of charming people and animals by the force of will. However, as I have already said, this has nothing to do with what I did."

"But you do not deny, do you, that you have studied this science and possess this gift?"

"Of course I don't. Every Hindu of my sect is bound to study the mysteries of physiology and psychology amongst other secrets left to us by our ancestors. But what of that? I am very much afraid, my dear colonel," said the Thakur with a quiet smile, "that you are rather inclined to view the simplest of my acts through a mystical prism. Narayan has been telling you all kinds of things about me behind my back. . . . Now, is it not so?"

And he looked at Narayan, who sat at his feet, with an indescribable mixture of fondness and reproof. The Dekkan colossus dropped his eyes and remained silent.

"You have guessed rightly," absently answered Mr. Y—, busy over his drawing apparatus. "Narayan sees in you something like his late deity Shiva; something just a little less than Parabrahm. Would you believe it? He seriously assured us—in Nasik it was—that the Raja Yogis, and amongst them yourself—though I must own I still fail to understand what a Raja Yogi is, precisely—can force any one to see, not what is before his eyes at the given moment, but what is only in the imagination of the Raja Yogi. If I remember rightly he called it Maya. . . . Now, this seemed to me going a little too far!"

"Well! You did not believe, of course, and laughed at Narayan?" asked the Thakur, fathoming with his eyes the dark green deeps of the lake.

"Not precisely. . . . Though, I dare say, I did just a little bit," went on Mr. Y——, absently, being fully engrossed by the view, and trying to fix his eyes on the most effective part of it. "I dare say I am too sceptical on this kind of question."

"And knowing Mr. Y—— as I do," said the colonel, "I can add, for my part, that even were any of these phenomena to happen to himself personally, he, like Dr. Carpenter, would doubt his own eyes rather than believe."

"However, there are any number of people, who do not doubt, because they have had proof that this phenomenon really occurs," remarked the Thakur, in a careless tone, which showed he had not the slightest desire to insist upon this topic.

However, this remark only increased Mr. Y——'s excitement.

"No doubt there are!" he exclaimed. "But what does that prove? Besides them, there are equal numbers of people who believe in the materialization of spirits. But do me the kindness of not including me among them!"

"Don't you believe in animal magnetism?"

"To a certain extent, I do. If a person suffering from some contagious illness can influence a person in good health, and make him ill, in his turn, I suppose somebody else's overflow of health can also affect the sick person, and, perhaps cure him. But between physiological contagion and mesmeric influence there is a great gulf, and I don't feel inclined to cross this gulf on the grounds of blind faith. It is perfectly possible that there are instances of thought-transference in cases of somnambulism, epilepsy, trance. I do not positively deny it, though I am very doubtful.

Mediums and clairvoyants are a sickly lot, as a rule. But I bet you anything, a healthy man in perfectly normal condition is not to be influenced by the tricks of mesmerism. I should like to see a magnetizer, or even a Raja Yogi, inducing *me* to obey his will."

"Now, my dear fellow, you really ought not to speak so rashly," said the colonel, who, till then, had not taken any part in the discussion.

"Ought I not? Don't take it into your head that it is mere boastfulness on my part. I guarantee failure in my case, simply because every renowned European mesmerist has tried his luck with me, without any result; and that is why I defy the whole lot of them to try again, and feel perfectly safe about it. And why a Hindu Raja Yogi should succeed where the strongest of European mesmerists failed, I do not quite see. . . ."

Mr. Y—— was growing altogether too excited, and the Thakur dropped the subject, and talked of something else.

The Babu and Mulji left us to help the servants to transport our luggage to the ferry boat. The remainder of the party had grown very quiet and silent. Miss X——dozed peacefully in the carriage, forgetting her recent fright. The colonel, stretched on the sand, amused himself by throwing stones into the water. Narayan sat motionless, with his hands round his knees, plunged as usual in the mute contemplation of Gulab-Lal-Sing. Mr. Y——sketched hurriedly and diligently, only raising his head from time to time to glance at the opposite shore, and *knitting* his brow in a preoccupied way. The Thakur went on smoking, and as for me, I sat on my folding chair, looking lazily at everything round me, till my eyes rested on Gulab-Sing, and were fixed, as if by a spell.

"Who and what is this mysterious Hindu?" I wondered in my uncertain thoughts. "Who is this man, who unites in

himself two such distinct personalities: the one exterior, kept up for strangers, for the world in general, the other interior, moral and spiritual, shown only to a few intimate friends? But even these intimate friends—do they know much beyond what is generally known? And what do they know? They see in him a Hindu who differs very little from the rest of educated natives, perhaps only in his perfect contempt for the social conventions of India and the demands of Western civilization. . . . And that is all—unless I add that he is known in Central India as a sufficiently wealthy man, and a Thakur, a feudal chieftain of a Raj, one of the hundreds of similar Rajas. Besides, he is a true friend of ours, who offered us his protection in our travels and volunteered to play the mediator between us and the suspicious, uncommunicative Hindus. Beyond all this, we know absolutely nothing about him. It is true, though, that I know a little more than others; but I have promised silence, and silent I shall be. But the little I know is so strange, so unusual, that it is more like a dream than a reality.”

A good while ago, more than twenty-seven years, I met him in the house of a stranger in England, whither he came in the company of a certain dethroned Indian prince. Then our acquaintance was limited to two conversations; their unexpectedness, their gravity, and even severity, produced a strong impression on me then; but in the course of time, like many other things, they sank into oblivion and Lethe. About seven years ago he wrote to me to America, reminding me of our conversation and of a certain promise I had made. Now we saw each other once more in India, his own country, and I failed to see any change wrought in his appearance by all these long years. He was, and looked, quite young, when I first saw him; but the passage of years had not failed to change me into an old woman. As to him, he appeared to me twenty-seven years ago a man of about thirty, and

still looked no older, as if time were powerless against him. In England, his striking beauty, especially his extraordinary height and stature, together with his eccentric refusal to be presented to the Queen—an honour many a high-born Hindu has sought, coming over on purpose—excited the public notice and the attention of the newspaper-men of those days, when the influence of Byron was still great, discussed the "wild Rajput" with untiring pens, calling him "Raja-Misanthrope" and "Prince Jalma-Samson," and inventing fables about him all the time he stayed in England.

All this taken together was well calculated to fill me with consuming curiosity, and to absorb my thoughts till I forgot every exterior circumstance, sitting and staring at him in no wise less intensely than Narayan.

I gazed at the remarkable face of Gulab-Lal-Sing with a mixed feeling of indescribable fear and enthusiastic admiration; recalling the mysterious death of the Karli tiger, my own miraculous escape a few hours ago in Bagh, and many other incidents too many to relate. It was only a few hours since he appeared to us in the morning, and yet what a number of strange ideas, of puzzling occurrences, how many enigmas his presence stirred in our minds! The magic circle of my revolving thought grew too much for me. "What does all this mean!" I exclaimed to myself, trying to shake off my torpor, and struggling to find words for my meditation. "Who is this being whom I saw so many years ago, jubilant with manhood and life, and now see again, as young and as full of life, only still more austere, still more incomprehensible. After all, maybe it is his brother, or even his son?" thought I, trying to calm myself, but with no result. "No! there is no use doubting; it is he himself, it is the same face, the same little scar on the left temple. But, as a quarter of a century ago, so now: no

wrinkles on those beautiful classic features; not a white hair in this thick jet-black mane; and, in moments of silence, the same expression of perfect rest on that face, calm as a statue of living bronze. What a strange expression, and what a wonderful Sphinx-like face!"

"Not a very brilliant comparison, my old friend!" suddenly spoke the Thakur, and a good-natured laughing note rang in his voice, whilst I shuddered and grew red like a naughty school girl. "This comparison is so inaccurate that it decidedly sins against history in two important points. *Primo*, the Sphinx is a lion; so am I, as indicates the word Sing in my name; but the Sphinx is winged, and I am not. *Secondo*, the Sphinx is a woman as well as a winged lion, but the Rajput Sinhas never had anything effeminate in their characters. Besides, the Sphinx is the daughter of Chimera, or Echidna, who were neither beautiful nor good; and so you might have chosen a more flattering and a less inaccurate comparison!"

I simply gasped in my utter confusion, and he gave vent to his merriment, which by no means relieved me.

"Shall I give you some good advice?" continued Gulab-Sing, changing his tone for a more serious one. "Don't trouble your head with such vain speculations. The day when this riddle yields its solution, the Rajput Sphinx will not seek destruction in the waves of the sea; but, believe me, it won't bring any profit to the Russian Edipus either. You already know every detail you ever will learn. So leave the rest to our respective fates."

And he rose because the Babu and Mulji had informed us that the ferry boat was ready to start, and were shouting and making signs to us to hasten.

"Just let me finish," said Mr. Y——, "I have nearly done. Just an additional touch or two."

"Let us see your work. Hand it round!" insisted the colon-

el and Miss X——, who had just left her haven of refuge in the carriage, and joined us still half asleep.

Mr. Y——hurriedly added a few more touches to his drawing and rose to collect his brushes and pencils.

We glanced at his fresh wet picture and opened our eyes in astonishment. There was no lake on it, no woody shores, and no velvety evening mists that covered the distant island at this moment. Instead of all this we saw a charming sea view; thick clusters of shapely palm-trees scattered over the chalky cliffs of the littoral; a fortress-like bungalow with balconies and a flat roof, an elephant standing at its entrance, and a native boat on the crest of a foaming billow.

"Now what is this view, sir?" wondered the colonel. "As if it was worth your while to sit in the sun, and detain us all, to draw fancy picture out of your own head!"

"What on earth are you talking about?" exclaimed Mr. Y——. "Do you mean to say you do not recognize the lake?"

"Listen to him—the lake! Where is the lake, if you please? Were you asleep, or what?"

By this time all our party gathered round the colonel, who held the drawing. Narayan uttered an exclamation, and stood still, the very image of bewilderment past description.

"I know the place!" said he, at last. "This is Dayri-Bol, the country house of the Thakur-Sahib. I know it. Last year during the famine I lived there for two months."

I was the first to grasp the meaning of it all, but something prevented me from speaking at once.

At last Mr. Y——finished arranging and packing his things, and approached us in his usual lazy, careless way, but his face showed traces of vexation. He was evidently bored by our persistency in seeing a sea, where there was nothing but the corner of a lake. But, at the first sight



of his unlucky sketch, his countenance suddenly changed. He grew so pale, and the expression of his face became so piteously distraught that it was painful to see. He turned, re-turned the piece of Bristol board, then rushed like a madman to his drawing portfolio and turned the whole contents out, ransacking and scattering over the sand hundreds of sketches and of loose papers. Evidently failing to find what he was looking for, he glanced again at his sea-view, and suddenly covering his face with his hands totally collapsed.

We all remained silent, exchanging glances of wonder and pity, and heedless of the Thakur, who stood on the ferry boat, vainly calling to us to join him.

"Look here, Y——!" timidly spoke the kind-hearted colonel, as if addressing a sick child. "Are you sure you remember drawing this view?"

Mr. Y——did not give any answer, as if gathering strength and thinking it over. After a few moments he answered in hoarse and tremulous tones:

"Yes, I do remember. Of course I made this sketch, but I made it from nature. I painted only what I saw. And it is the very certainty that upsets me so."

"But why should you be upset, my dear fellow? Collect yourself! What happened to you is neither shameful nor dreadful. It is only the result of the temporary influence of one dominant will over another, less powerful. You simply acted under 'biological influence,' to use the expression of Dr. Carpenter."

"That is exactly what I am most afraid of. . . . I remember everything now. I have been busy over this view more than an hour. I saw it directly I chose the spot, and seeing it all the while on the opposite shore I could not suspect anything uncanny. I was perfectly conscious, . . . or, shall I say, I fancied I was conscious of putting down on paper what everyone of you had before your eyes.

I had lost every notion of the place as I saw it before I began my sketch, and as I see it now. . . . But how do you account for it? Good gracious! am I to believe that these confounded Hindus really possess the mystery of this trick? I tell you, colonel, I shall go mad if I don't understand it all!"

The island was a tiny one, and so overgrown with tall reeds that, from a distance, it looked like a pyramidal basket of verdure. With the exception of a colony of monkeys, who busied away to a few mango trees at our approach, the place seemed uninhabited. In this virgin forest of thick grass there was no trace of human life. Seeing the word *grass* the reader must not forget that it is not the grass of Europe I mean; the grass under which we stood, like insects under a rhubarb leaf, waved its feathery many-coloured plumes much above the head of Gulab-Sing (who stood six feet and a half in his stockings), and of Narayan, who measured hardly an inch less. From a distance it looked like a waving sea of black, yellow, blue, and especially of rose and green. On landing, we discovered that it consisted of separate thickets of bamboos, mixed up with the gigantic sirka reeds, which rose as high as the tops of the mangoes.

It is impossible to imagine anything prettier and more graceful than the bomboos and sirka. The isolated tufts of bamboos show, in spite of their size, that they are nothing but grass, because the least gush of wind shakes them, and their green crests begin to nod like heads adorned with long ostrich plumes. There were some bamboos there fifty or sixty feet high. From time to time we heard a light metallic rustle in the reeds, but none of us paid much attention to it.

Whilst our coolies and servants were busy clearing a place for our tents, pitching them and preparing the supper, we

went to pay our respects to the monkeys, the true hosts of the place. Without exaggeration there were at least two hundred. While preparing for their nightly rest the monkeys behaved like decorous and well-behaved people; every family chose a separate branch and defended it from the intrusion of strangers lodging on the same tree, but this defence never passed the limits of good manners, and generally took the shape of threatening grimaces. There were many mothers with babies in arms amongst them; some of them treated the children tenderly, and lifted them cautiously, with a perfectly human care; others, less thoughtful, ran up and down, heedless of the child hanging at their breasts, preoccupied with something, discussing something, and stopping every moment to quarrel with other monkey ladies—a true picture of chatty old gossips on a market day, repeated in the animal kingdom. The bachelors kept apart, absorbed in their athletic exercises, performed for the most part with the ends of their tails. One of them, especially, attracted our attention by dividing his amusement between *sauts penilleur* and teasing a respectable looking grandfather, who sat under a tree hugging two little monkeys. Swinging backward and forward from the branch, the bachelor jumped at him, bit his ear playfully and made faces at him, chattering all the time. We cautiously passed from one tree to another, afraid of frightening them away; but evidently the years spent by them with the fakirs, who left the island only a year ago, had accustomed them to human society. They were sacred monkeys, as we learned, and so they had nothing to fear from men. They showed no signs of alarm at our approach, and, having received our greeting, and some of them a piece of sugar-cane, they calmly stayed on their branch thrones, crossing their arms, and looking at us with a good deal of dignified contempt in their intelligent hazel eyes.

The sun had set, and we were told that the supper was ready. We all turned "homewards," except the Babu. The main feature of his character, in the eyes of orthodox Hindus, being a tendency to blasphemy, he could never resist the temptation to justify their opinion of him. Climbing up a high branch he crouched there, imitating every gesture of the monkeys and answering their threatening grimaces by still uglier ones, to the unconcealed disgust of our pious coolies.

As the last golden ray disappeared on the horizon, a gauze-like veil of pale lilac fell over the world. But as every moment decreased the transparency of this tropical twilight, the tint gradually lost its softness and became darker and darker. It looked as if an invisible painter, unceasingly moving his gigantic brush swiftly laid one coat of paint over the other, ever changing the exquisite background of our islet. The phosphoric candles of the fireflies began to twinkle here and there, shining brightly against the black trunks of the trees, and lost again on the silvery background of opalescent evening sky. But in a few minutes more thousands of these living sparks, precursors of Queen Night, played round us, pouring like a golden cascade over the trees, and dancing in the air above the grass and the dark lake.

And behold! here is the queen in person. Noiselessly descending upon earth, she reassumes her rights. With her approach, rest and peace spread over us; her cool breath calms the activities of day. Like a fond mother, she sings a lullaby to nature, lovingly wrapping her in her soft black mantle; and, when everything is asleep, she watches over nature's dozing powers till the first streaks of dawn.

Nature sleeps; but man is awake, to be witness to the beauties of this solemn evening hour. Sitting round the fire we talked, lowering our voices as if afraid of awaking

night. We were only six; the colonel, the four Hindus and myself, because Mr. Y—— and Miss X—— could not resist the fatigue of the day and had gone to sleep directly after supper.

Snugly sheltered by the high "grass," we had not the heart to spend this magnificent night in prosaic sleeping. Besides, we were waiting for the "concert" which the Thakur had promised us.

"Be patient," said he, "the musicians will not appear before the moon rises."

The fickle goddess was late; she kept us waiting till after ten o'clock. Just before her arrival, when the horizon began to grow perceptibly brighter, and the opposite shore to assume a milky, silvery tint, a sudden wind rose. The waves, that had gone quietly to sleep at the feet of gigantic reeds, awoke and tossed uneasily, till the reeds swayed their feathery heads and murmured to each other as if taking counsel together about something that was going to happen. . . . Suddenly, in the general stillness and silence, we heard again the same musical notes, which we had passed unheeded, when we first reached the island, as if a whole orchestra were trying their musical instruments before playing some great composition. All round us, and over our heads, vibrated strings of violins, and thrilled the separate notes of a flute. In a few moments came another gust of wind tearing through the reeds, and the whole island resounded with the strains of hundreds of AEolian harps. And suddenly there began a wild unceasing symphony. It swelled in the surrounding woods, filling the air with an indescribable melody. Sad and solemn were its prolonged strains; they resounded like the *arpeggios* of some funeral march, then, changing into a trembling thrill, they shook the air like the song of a nightingale, and died away in a long sigh. They did not quite cease, but grew louder again,

ringing like hundreds of silver bells, changing from the heartrending howl of a wolf, deprived of her young, to the precipitate rhythm of a gay tarantella, forgetful of every earthly sorrow; from the articulate song of a human voice, to the vague majestic accords of a violoncello, from merry child's laughter to angry sobbing. And all this was repeated in every direction by mocking echo, as if hundreds of fabulous forest maidens, disturbed in their green abodes, answered the appeal of the wild musical Saturnalia.

The colonel and I glanced at each other in our great astonishment.

"How delightful! What witchcraft is this?" we exclaimed at the same time.

The Hindus smiled, but did not answer us. The Thakur smoked his gargari as peacefully as if he was deaf.

There was a short interval, after which the invisible orchestra started again with renewed energy. The sounds poured and rolled in unrestrainable, overwhelming waves. We had never heard anything like this inconceivable wonder. Listen! A storm in the open sea, the wind tearing through the rigging, the swish of the maddened waves rushing over each other, or the whirling snow wreaths on the silent steppes. Suddenly the vision is changed; now it is a stately cathedral and the thundering strains of an organ rising under its vaults. The powerful notes now rush together, now spread out through space, break off, intermingle, and become entangled, like the fantastic melody of a delirious fever, some musical phantasy born of the howling and whistling of the wind.

Alas! the charm of these sounds is soon exhausted, and you begin to feel that they cut like knives through your brain. A horrid fancy haunts our bewildered heads; we imagine that the invisible artists strain our own veins, and not the strings of imaginary violins; their cold breath

freezes us, blowing their imaginary trumpets, shaking our nerves and impeding our breathing.

"For God's sake stop this, Thakur! This is really too much," shouted the colonel, at the end of his patience, and covering his ears with his hands. "Gulab-Sing, I tell you you must stop this."

The three Hindus burst out laughing; and even the grave face of the Thakur lit up with a merry smile.

"Upon my word," said he, "do you really take me for the great Parabrahm? Do you think it is in my power to stop the wind, as if I were Marut, the lord of the storms, in person. Ask for something easier than the instantaneous uprooting of all these bamboos."

"I beg your pardon; I thought these strange sounds also were some kind of psychologic influence."

"So sorry to disappoint you, my dear colonel; but you really must think less of psychology and electrobiology. This develops into a mania with you. Don't you see that this wild music is a natural acoustic phenomenon? Each of the reeds around us—and there are thousands on this island—contains a natural musical instrument; and the musician. Wind, comes here daily to try his art after night-fall—especially during the last quarter of the moon."

"The wind!" murmured the colonel. "Oh, yes! But this music begins to change into a dreadful roar. Is there no way out of it?"

"I at least cannot help it. But keep up your patience, you will soon get accustomed to it. Besides, there will be intervals when the wind falls."

We were told that there are many such natural orchestras in India. The Brahmans know well their wonderful properties, and calling this kind of reed *vina-devi*, the lute of the gods, keep up the popular superstition and say the sounds are divine oracles. The sirka grass and the bamboos

always shelter a number of tiny beetles, which make considerable holes in the hollow reeds. The fakirs of the idol-worshipping sects add art to this natural beginning and work the plants into musical instruments. The islet we visited bore one of the most celebrated *vina-devis*, and so, of course, was proclaimed sacred.

"To-morrow morning," said the Thakur, "you will see what deep knowledge of all the laws of acoustics was in the possession of the fakirs. They enlarged the holes made by the beetle according to the size of the reed, sometimes shaping it into a circle, sometimes into an oval. These reeds in their present state can be justly considered as the finest illustration of mechanism applied to acoustics. However, this is not to be wondered at, because some of the most ancient Sanskrit books about music minutely describe these laws, and mention many musical instruments which are not only forgotten, but totally incomprehensible in our days."

All this was very interesting, but still, disturbed by the din, we could not listen attentively.

"Don't worry yourselves," said the Thakur, who soon understood our uneasiness, in spite of our attempts at composure. "After midnight the wind will fall, and you will sleep undisturbed. However, if the too close neighbourhood of this musical grass is too much for you, we may as well go nearer to the shore. There is a spot from which you can see the sacred bonfires on the opposite shore."

We followed him, but while walking through the thickets of reeds we did not leave off our conversation.

"How is it that the Brahmans manage to keep up such an evident cheat?" asked the colonel. "The stupidest man cannot fail to see in the long run who made the holes in the reeds, and how they come to give forth music."

"In America stupid men may be clever as that; I don't



know," answered the Thakur, with a smile; "but not in India. If you took the trouble to show, to describe, and to explain how all this is done to any Hindu, be he even comparatively educated, he will still see nothing. He will tell you that he knows as well as yourself that the holes are made by the beetles and enlarged by the fakirs. But what of that? The beetle in his eyes is no ordinary beetle, but one of the gods incarnated in the insect for this special purpose; and the fakir is a holy ascetic, who has acted in this case by the order of the same god. That will be all you will ever get out of him. Fanaticism and superstition took centuries to develop in the masses, and now they are as strong as a necessary physiological function. Kill these two and the crowd will have its eyes opened, and will see truth, but not before. As to the Brahmans, India would have been very fortunate if everything they have done were as harmless. Let the crowds adore the muse and the spirit of harmony. This adoration is not so very wicked, after all."

We sat down, and only then I realized how tired and sleepy I was—and no wonder, after being on foot since four in the morning, and after all that had happened to me on this memorable day. The gentlemen went on talking, and I soon became so absorbed in my thoughts that their conversation reached me only in fragments.

"Wake up, wake up!" repeated the colonel, shaking me by the hand. "The Thakur says that sleeping in the moonlight will do you harm."

I was not asleep; I was simply thinking, though exhausted and sleepy. But wholly under the charm of this enchanting night, I could not shake off my drowsiness, and did not answer the colonel.

"Wake up, for God's sake! Think of what you are risking!" continued the colonel. "Wake up and look at the

landscape before us, at this wonderful moon. Have you ever seen anything to equal this magnificent panorama?"

I looked up, and the familiar lines of Pushkin about the golden moon of Spain flashed into my mind. And indeed this *was* a golden moon. At this moment she radiated rivers of golden light, poured forth liquid gold into the tossing lake at our feet, and sprinkled with golden dust every blade of grass, every pebble, as far as the eye could reach, all round us. Her disk of silvery yellow swiftly glided upward amongst the big stars, on their dark blue ground.

Many a moonlit night have I seen in India, but every time the impression was new and unexpected. It is no use trying to describe these feeerique pictures, they cannot be represented either in words or in colours on canvas, they can only be felt—so fugitive is their grandeur and beauty! In Europe, even in the south, the full moon eclipses the largest and most brilliant of the stars, so that hardly any can be seen for a considerable distance round her. In India it is quite the contrary; she looks like a huge pearl surrounded by diamonds, rolling on a blue velvet ground. Her light is so intense that one can read a letter written in small handwriting; one even can perceive the different greens of the trees and bushes—a thing unheard of in Europe. The effect of the moon is especially charming on tall palm trees. From the first moment of her appearance her rays glide over the tree downwards, beginning with the feathery crests, then lighting up the scales of the trunk, and descending lower and lower till the whole palm is literally bathing in a sea of light. Without any metaphor the surface of the leaves seems to tremble in liquid silver all the night long, whereas their under surfaces seem blacker and softer than black velvet. But woe to the thoughtless novice, woe to the mortal who gazes at the Indian moon with his head uncovered. It is very dangerous not only to sleep under,

but even to gaze at the chaste Indian Diana. Fits of epilepsy, madness and death are the punishments wrought by her treacherous arrows on the modern Acteon who dares to contemplate the cruel daughter of Latona in her full beauty. The Hindus never go out in the moonlight without their turbans or pagris. Even our invulnerable Babu always wore a kind of white cap during the night.

As soon as the reeds concert reaches its height and the inhabitants of the neighbourhood hear the distant "voices of the gods," whole villages flock together to the bank of the lake, light bonfires, and perform their pujas. The fires lit up one after the other, and the black silhouettes of the worshippers moved about on the opposite shore. Their sacred songs and loud exclamations, "Hari, Hari, Mahadeva!" resounded with a strange loudness and a wild emphasis in the pure air of the night. And the reeds, shaken in the wind, answered them with tender musical phrases. The whole stirred a vague feeling of uneasiness in my soul, a strange intoxication crept gradually over me, and in this enchanting place the idol-worship of these passionate, poetical souls, sunk in dark ignorance, seemed more intelligible and less repulsive. A Hindu is a born mystic, and the luxuriant nature of his country has made of him a zealous pantheist.

H. P. Blavatsky.

## KNOW INDIA

Every foreign soldier in India owes it as his duty to his country and to the world, that he should try to understand India, her peoples and problems. On this understanding of one country by the people of another will depend whether the world will have enduring peace after this War, or fresh wars to destroy all civilisation.

Therefore Read Books on India (see wrapper of this book).

## SOLDIER'S PROMISE

It was Tunisia Day, and the soldiers had almost an off day except for the morning pageants through the main roads of a city in South India. A group of army men who were internationalists in outlook, and had cultivated many friendship outside their regiments and their nationalities met at 3 p.m. on the outskirts of the city. They were all young fellows—gay, lighthearted, and fond of outings to strange places in India.

One among this international group of soldiers, an Indian named Rajendar Singh, had a peculiar attraction for a British soldier of the same group, Sgt. Bryan, perhaps because he alone of the party seemed to have occasional fits of sadness—spells of serious thought, during which he withdrew into himself, and almost repelled the advances of his companions. He was handsome, dark, and tall, a well-read man but one who shrank from displaying his knowledge, a man somewhat out of the ordinary run, a man, perhaps, with a history. This Indian soldier, as already stated, was an object of attraction to Sgt. Bryan, and though he was reserved at first, the two had ultimately become firm friends. In his more melancholy moods, when he avoided the society of others, Rajendar Singh used to find a sort of passive pleasure in that of Bryan. At such times he would say but little, and sit gazing steadily at the horizon, with a strange far-away look in his deep, earnest eyes. So would a man look whom some terrible sorrow, some ghastly experience, had marked off for ever from the rest of mankind—but Bryan asked no questions, waiting patiently till the time should come when their ripening friendship should reveal the secret.

The other members of the international group for the

day's outing were Major Rivers, an Australian, Corporal Beauchamp, a Canadian, and Captain Tupman, an American. Major Rivers had decided, on this day, to be the leader of the party, and the party naturally looked to him for an idea.

"Gentlemen, I have a proposal to make."

"Hear, hear!" all the rest shouted.

"My idea," said the Major, "is this. You see that hill over there to the right? Well, I know this part of the country thoroughly, and I know that the river passes just on the other side of the hill. Now though it is, as you see, only a few miles off in a straight line, it is at least four times that distance by water, in consequence of the windings of the river. Let us take a boat three miles along the river, and then strike out into the jungle for the hill. It is an adventure which you will all enjoy. I have a gun, and a little shooting in those jungles will be pleasant diversion."

All the friends hailed the suggestion with acclamation, and they were soon sailing in a country boat, along with a large dog which belonged to the Major—a fine, intelligent animal, and a general favourite. In an hour, they leapt ashore, and were springing from bush to bush and stone to stone till their difficulties culminated in a muddy ditch which looked about twelve feet broad.

"Rather a long jump for a man with a heavy gun!" said Sgt. Bryan.

"Oh," replied Major Rivers, "I think I can manage it. I am going to try, and if I get over with my limping leg, it ought to be easy enough for you young fellows."

He took a short run, and sprang just clearing the ditch; but unluckily the slimy edge of the bank gave way under his feet, and he slipped back into the water. In a moment the rest of the party took the leap, all getting safely across, and rushed to his assistance. He was quite unheart, and

not even wet, thanks to his enormous topboots; but his gun was choked with mud, and required a thorough cleaning. He threw himself down with a laugh under the nearest tree, and began fanning himself with his hat, saying:—

“You will have to go without me for a while.”

The party all protested against leaving him, objecting that they did not know the country, and offered to stop and help him; but this he refused to permit.

“No, no,” he said, “you must push on, and see what you can find; I shall follow in half an hour or so. We cannot miss one another, you have only to climb a tree and you will get the direction at once. But in any case do not fail to be at the boat at 7 o'clock, for whether I overtake you in the meantime or not, *I promise you I will be there to meet you.*”

Somewhat reluctantly they obeyed, and plunged into the jungle, leaving him still lying fanning himself under the tree. They had walked on for an hour without mishap, and were just beginning to wonder whether the Major would join them, when Rajendar Singh, who happened to be next to Bryan, stopped suddenly, turned pale as death, and pointing straight before him cried in accents of horror:—

“See! see! merciful heaven, look there!”

“What? What? What is it?” they all shouted confusedly, as they rushed up to him and looked round in expectation of encountering a tiger, a cobra, they hardly knew what, but assuredly something terrible, since it had caused such evident emotion in their usually self-possessed comrade. But neither tiger nor cobra was visible; nothing but Rajendar, pointing with ghastly haggard face and starting eyeballs at *something they could not see.*

“Rajen! Rajen!” cried Bryan, seizing his arm, “for heaven's sake, speak! what is the matter?”

Scarcely were the words out of his mouth when a low but

very peculiar sound struck on his ear, and Rajendar, dropping his pointing hand, said in a hoarse strained voice:

"There! you heard it? Thank God it's over!"

Even as he spoke, he fell to the ground insensible. There was a momentary confusion while they unfastened his collar, and Bryan dashed in his face some water which fortunately he had in his flask; and he whispered to Beauchamp (one of the greatest sceptics in their group):

"Beauchamp, did *you* hear anything?"

"Why, yes," he replied, "a curious sound, very; a sort of crash or rattle far away in the distance, yet very distinct; if the thing were not utterly impossible I could have sworn it was the rattle of musketry."

"Just my impression," murmured Bryan; "but hush! he is recovering."

In a minute or two he was able to speak feebly, and began to thank his friends and apologise for giving trouble; and soon he sat up, leaning against a tree, and in a firm though still low voice said:

"You may perhaps have noticed that when during the boat trip you all joined in scoffing at dreams, portents, and visions, I invariably avoided giving any opinion on the subject. I did so because, while I had no desire to court ridicule or provoke discussion, I was unable to agree with you, knowing only too well from my own dread experience that the world which men agree to call that of the supernatural is just as real as this world we see about us—perhaps even far more so. In other words, I, like many of my countrymen, am cursed with the gift of second sight—that awful faculty which foretells in vision calamities that are shortly to occur.

"Such a vision I had just now, and its exceptional horror moved me as you have seen. I saw before me a corpse—not that of one who has died a peaceful, natural death, but

that of the victim of some terrible accident—a ghastly, shapeless mass, with a face swollen, crushed, unrecognizable. I saw this dreadful object placed in a coffin, and the funeral service performed over it; I saw the burial ground, I saw the clergymen; and though I had never seen either before, I can picture both perfectly in my mind's eye now. I saw you, myself, Beauchamp, all of us and many more, standing round as mourners; I saw the soldiers raise their muskets after the service was over; I heard the volley they fired—and then I knew no more."

As he spoke of that volley of musketry Bryan glanced across with a shudder at Beauchamp, and the look of stony horror on that handsome sceptic's face was one not to be forgotten. The spell of the vision was upon them all, and no one liked to be the first to speak; and for a long minute, perhaps two minutes, there was a silence which could be felt—that silence of tropical noon which is so far deeper than that of midnight.

And then—it was broken. Broken, not by any of the ordinary sounds of the forest, but by one which under the circumstances startled them far more than the growl of the tiger or the hiss of the serpent would have done—the deep solemn 'clang!' of a great church-bell.

"Good God, what is that?" cried Beauchamp, thoroughly unnerved as they all sprang to their feet, while the dog threw up his head and howled.

"It's the bell tolling for that funeral of Rajendar's vision" said Tupman the wit of the party, trying to smile with a very white face; but the joke fell for they were in no mood for laughter. While they still stood awe-stricken, gazing at one another, again the unmistakable sonorous 'clang!' rang out in their ears—not borne by the wind and mellowed by distance, but in the very midst of them close over their heads—so close that they felt the ground vibrate in response to its stroke.



"Let us leave this accursed spot!" cried Bryan, seizing Rajendar's arm. Beauchamp caught him by the other, and between them they half supported, half dragged him along. The others followed; but they had not gone ten yards before that hollow knell sounded once more in their midst, adding wings to their speed; and again the dog howled dismally.

Nothing else happened, however, and for a mile or more they hurried along in silence, until they came upon a beautiful grassy dell through which meandered a clear silvery streamlet. On its edge they threw themselves down to rest; indeed Rajendar, not yet thoroughly recovered, seemed incapable of going further. After a long draught of the cool water they became more composed, and began seriously to review their remarkable experience.

As to Rajendar's vision, after witnessing his intense and painful agitation it was impossible to doubt that it was sufficiently real to *him*, and (the phenomenon being a purely subjective one) there was little more to be said. More difficult to deal with was the faint, distant, yet surprisingly distinct sound of a volley of musketry which Beauchamp and Bryan had both heard. Tupman who had heard nothing, declared that the sound had existed only in their heated imagination, excited as they naturally were by Rajendar's strange condition; and, when reminded of its singular agreement with the termination of his vision, attributed that fact to mere coincidence.

Neither Beauchamp nor Bryan were at all satisfied with this; they had heard the sound, and they *knew* that this theory was not the true explanation; but as they were entirely unable to suggest a more rational one, it was useless to argue. But then that weird church-bell! No one dreamt of suggesting imagination in that case; they had all alike heard it—all felt the vibration of the earth which it caused

—all agreed exactly in the description of its sound, and in locating it in the very midst of them.

"Still," said Tupman, "of course there must be some means of accounting for it naturally. Even if there were such things as spirits, it would be absurd to suppose them capable of producing a noise such as that. I have read of cases in which some unusual description of echo has been found capable of reproducing a sound with startling fidelity even at an almost incredible distance."

"An echo!" replied Rajendar scornfully; "there is not a church-bell within fifty miles of us—not such an one as that, probably, in the whole of India, for it sounded like the Great Bell of Moscow."

"Yes, that sound had certainly not travelled fifty miles," remarked Beauchamp reflectively. "You have heard, I suppose, of the campanero of South America?"

They had all read of this lovely bird and its wonderful bell-like note, but they had no reason to believe that any such creature existed in India; besides, they all agreed that no specimen of the feathered tribe was ever hatched which could have produced that tremendous metallic clang.

"I wish the Major had been with us," said Tupman; "he knows the country, and perhaps he might be able to suggest something. Ha! I have it! I see the explanation of the mystery! How absurd of us not to have thought of it before! Of course the Major, who stayed behind, has been playing some trick upon us and is now having a good laugh somewhere or other at the recollection of our foolish fright!"

"A bright idea! that must be it!" exclaimed Beauchamp.

"But stay," interposed Bryan, "*how* could he have done it? He can hardly have been carrying a bell weighing two or three tons or so in his coat-pocket."

"Oh, no doubt he found some method or other," answered Tupman; "for example, I have heard that a properly

prepared bar of iron will when struck give out a very fair imitation of a bell sound."

"Perhaps so, but then properly prepared bars of iron are not usually to be found lying about in an Indian jungle, and he certainly brought nothing with him from the boat."

"Well, possibly the barrel of his gun might be made—" but here a general smile checked the speaker, and Rajendar quietly remarked:

"No, Tupman, I do not think that will quite answer as an explanation; besides, how do you account for the sound coming from a point close above our heads?"

"Much may be done by skilful management of ventriloquism," replied Tupman.

"Ventriloquism! my dear fellow, can you seriously suppose that such a sound as that ever proceeded from any human throat?"

"Well," answered Tupman, "I cannot say; but until you can find me a better, I cling to my hypothesis that the Major is responsible for our fright in some way or other."

To this Beauchamp somewhat hesitatingly agreed; Rajendar smiled sadly and shook his head, but said no more; as for Bryan he knew not what to think, for his scepticism was considerably shaken by the strange events of the morning.

They lay there by that pleasant stream for some time each ransacking his memory in turn for some half-forgotten story of the supernatural, of goblin, ghost, or fairy, told perhaps by some old nurse in happy childish days. And Rajendar told them his first experience of second sight.

"The first experience I well remember," he said; "I was a little lad of six or seven, and one evening when my father and I were out walking together, we stood to watch the fishermen of our little village push off their boats and start for their night's work. Among them were two fine lads,

Ajit and Dayal who were particular favourites of mine, and used frequently to bring strange fish for "the little Sardar" (as they called me) to see; and once I had even been out in their boat. So I waved my hand to them as they set sail, and then we could watch the boats as they stood far out to sea. ...

"We were nearly at home again, when, coming round an angle of the grey old wall of a fort I was much surprised to see Ajit and Dayal leaning against it. I was about to speak to them, when the sudden tightening of my father's grasp upon my hand caused me to look up in his face, and the stern, set expression that I saw there diverted my attention for the moment from the lads, though I noticed that they did not seem to see us at all.

"Father," I asked, "what can Ajit and Dayal be doing there?"

"He looked down on me with deep compassion, and said:

" 'And did ye see them too? Eh! my lad, my lad!'

"After that he took no notice of my questions, and spoke no more till we reached home. He retired to his room, while I ran down to the beach to see why my young friends' boat had returned; but to my astonishment there was no boat there, and an old woman, who had been sitting spinning at her door close by the whole time, assured me that there certainly had been none since the whole fleet set sail together two hours before. I was puzzled, but still I never doubted that somehow my friends had been there in real flesh and blood; even the great storm which woke me in the night suggested nothing, and it was only when in the early morning I saw men reverently bearing two bodies into the house where Ajit and Dayal had lived, that I had any idea of the true nature of what I had seen."

Thus time passed on, till the declining rays of the sun

warned the party that they must think of returning to the boat. They had not far to go, for the place where they were to meet was full in sight, and they had only to pass through a wood which skirted it. By this time they had somewhat recovered their normal tone, and were laughing and chatting gaily, wondering where they should find the Major, and thinking what an incredible story they had to tell him. Beauchamp, who was leading, called out:

"Here is the end of the wood at last!"

Suddenly the Major's dog, which had been roaming about in advance, came flying back and cowered down among them with every sign of excessive fear. They had no time to wonder at this unusual behaviour before again in their midst sounded that solemn sonorous 'clang!' just as before and again the trembling dog threw up his head and howled.

"Ha!" exclaimed Rajendar, quickly turning upon Tupman; "echo? ventriloquism? an iron bar? a musket-barrel? which hypothesis do you prefer now?"

And as his voice ceased the dread unearthly knell again crashed forth. With one consent they sprang towards the open ground at the end of the wood, but before they could reach it the spectral bell rang once more in their very ears—almost in their very brains, as it seemed—amid the frantic howls of the dog. They rushed out in great disorder into the broad meadow sloping down to the river, and it was with an unutterable sense of relief that they saw their boat, already moored, waiting to receive them, and the Major some distance in front of them limping hastily towards it.

"Major! Major!" they shouted.

But he did not turn his head, sharp though his ears were generally; he only hurried on towards the boat, so they all started in pursuit, running as hard as they could. To their

surprise the dog, instead of accompanying them, uttered one final dismal yelp and dashed back into the haunted wood; but no one thought of following him, for their attention was fixed on the Major. Fast as they ran they were unable to overtake him, and they were still some fifty yards from the boat when he hurried across the plank that the boatman had just put down as a gangway. He went down the stairs, still in the same hurried manner, and they rushed after him, but to their intense surprise were unable to find him anywhere. The boat was empty; and though they searched the whole barge, not a trace of him could they find.

"Well," cried Tupman, "this is the strangest trick of all."

Rajendar and Bryan exchanged glances, but Tupman, not observing them, rushed on deck and demanded of the head boatman where the Major was.

"Sahib," replied the man, "I have not seen him since he left with you this morning."

"Why, what do you mean?" roared Tupman; "he came on board this barge not a minute before we did, and I saw you put down a plank for him to cross with your own hands!"

"Sir," answered the man, exhibiting the greatest astonishment; "you certainly mistake; you were yourself the first person to come on board, and I laid down the plank because I saw you coming; as for the Major Sahib, I have not set eyes upon him since you all left."

They could do nothing but stare at one another in blank amazement, not unmingled with awe; and Bryan heard Rajendar mutter as if to himself:

"He is dead, then, as I feared, and the vision was for him after all."

"There is something very strange about all this," said

Beauchamp, "something which I cannot at all understand; but one thing is clear. We must at once go back to the place where we left the Major and search for him. Some accident may have happened."

They explained to the head boatman where they had parted from the Major, and found that he at once shared their worst fears.

"That is a very dangerous place, Sahib," he said; "there was once a village there, and there are two or three deep wells whose mouths are entirely overgrown by bushes and weeds; and the Major Sahib, being so short-sighted, would be very likely to fall into one of them."

This intelligence naturally increased their apprehensions tenfold, and they lost no time in setting off, taking with them three of the boatmen and a coil of stout rope. As may be imagined, it was not without a shudder that they plunged again into the wood where they had heard those mysterious sounds which they had now so much reason to fear might have been in some inexplicable way intended as warnings to them of a calamity impending, or perhaps even then taking place. But the conversation turned chiefly on the latest marvel—the appearance and disappearance of what they could hardly help calling the Major's ghost.

They carefully compared notes, and ascertained beyond a doubt that all four of them had clearly seen him. They had all observed his hurried manner; they had all noticed that, though still wearing the top-boots, he had no hat upon his head and was no longer carrying his gun; they had all seen him descend the stairs on board the boat, and they were all perfectly certain that it would have been impossible for him, if a man in the flesh, to escape them unobserved. Sceptics though some of them had been as to supernatural visitations, none of them now ventured to hope

that they should find him alive; and perhaps it was no discredit to their prowess as soldiers to confess that they kept very close together as they spoke chiefly in whispers, except when at intervals they stopped, and all shouted together as they retraced their steps through those woods, so that if the Major were lying disabled anywhere in the neighbourhood he would be aware of their approach.

However, they met with nothing unusual on their way, and found without difficulty the place where they had crossed the ditch, and the tree under which they had left the Major. From this spot the boatmen easily tracked his footsteps for a few hundred yards, till one of them, running forward, picked up the hat and gun of the missing man—"the very articles," whispered Rajendar to Bryan, "which he had not when we saw him just now." They now felt certain that some terrible accident had occurred—probably close to the very spot where they stood; and sure enough the natives pointed out to them only a few yards off the concealed mouth of one of those old wells of which they had warned them. Alas! at its edge there were the unmistakable marks of slipping feet; and from the blackness of the depth into which they looked, they could hardly doubt that their poor friend must have been fatally injured, even if not at once killed, by the fall.

The sun was already setting, and night comes on so rapidly in the tropics that they had but little time to lose; so, as no answer came to their shouts, they hastily passed their rope round the branch of a tree which hung over the mouth of the well, and by its means one of the boatmen descended. Soon from an immense depth a shout came up; the man had reached the bottom, and had discovered a body, but was unable to tell us whether it was the Major's or not. They directed him to attach it to the rope, and with fast-beating hearts drew it to the surface of the earth.

It was a ghastly sight that met their eyes in the rapidly-



fading light. The corpse was indeed the Major's, but it was only by the clothes and the top-boots that they could identify it; scarcely anything of human shape was left in it, and the face was swollen and crushed past all recognition, as Rajendor had seen it in his vision. Death must have been instantaneous, for evidently as he fell down the well, the head must have struck more than once against the rough rocky projections which they could see as they peered into it. Horrible to relate, entangled in the rope which had been so hurriedly tied round the corpse was also the mangled, but yet warm and palpitating body of the Major's dog, which had rushed so madly into the jungle but an hour before! Sick with horror, they twined together a rude litter of branches, laid the Major's remains upon it with averted eyes, and bore it silently back to their boat.

Next day, when they accompanied the corpse of their dead friend to the grave, suddenly Rajendar clutched Bryan's arm, and pointing through some rude railings, said in a trembling voice:

"Yes, there it is! that is the burial-ground I saw yesterday."

And when later on they were introduced to the chaplain of the place, Bryan noticed, though his friends did not, the irrepressible shudder with which Rajendar took his hand, and he knew that he had recognized the clergyman of his vision.

(Adapted from C. W. Leadbeater.)

## KNOW INDIA

For books which will give to the foreign war-visitor a comprehensive general introduction to India, her peoples and problems, the reader may turn to the pages of the wrapper of this book, and pages 45, 59, 68, 85, 102, 122.





